



ファミ通文庫

霸剣の皇姫
アルティーナ
XII
ALTINA
the Sword Princess



ALTINA THE SWORD PRINCESS

- *Haken no Kouki Altina* -

- Volume 12 -

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駆けてきた少女が、
思い切り抱きついてくる。
全力で抱きしめられて——
レジスは「ぐえ」とカエルが潰れたような声を漏らした。



天が望まざとも、俺こそが皇帝だ。
諸国を呑みこむ大蛇となってくれようぞ！

宣言する。

「ベルガリア帝国こそは、
この地に唯一となるべき超大国である！
争う敵なくば、永遠の平和と繁栄が約束されよう。
我に続け！さすれば勝利を与えるよ！」



「え？ そ、それは……
最善を尽くす所存です！ 皆で、そう決めました！」



駐留連隊司令官
マリオン



黒騎士
ジェローム

「俺はジエローム・ジャン・ドゥ・バイル・シユミット少将だ
……答える。貴様らは生き残る気があるのか？」

ALTINA the Sword Princess

"I trust you" Altina and T...
bibliophagic boy face
difficulties together.



PROLOGUE

THE WAR CONFERENCE THAT WAS LATE

Imperial Year 851, August 12th. Evening—

The Fourth Army formed up on the eastern hill. They had 500 cavalry and 4,000 infantry.

To intercept them, the First Army set up formation at the foot of the hill. 1,000 cavalry and 10,000 infantry.

Be it numbers, training or equipment, the First Army had the upper hand.

However, the gallant victories the Fourth Army won in the High Britannian War had already spread across the entire Empire.

Although Latreille would be coronated as the new emperor tomorrow, the imperial capital Versailles was shrouded in a tense atmosphere.

The Fourth Army Headquarters—

Eric, the escort rifleman asked:

“Your Highness, what should we do?

Altina stood on the hill and stared down the First Army.

“Charge them!”

“Ehhh!?”

“—— If I said that, I can imagine Regis’ face as he tries his very best to stop me. If he was here, he would definitely object to this.”

“That might be so... After all, battling the First Army is too rash. And we don’t have the proper rationale to support our campaign too right?”

"If they didn't have a guilty conscience, why did they make such a big fuss and mobilize their troops?"

"No no, we are the ones who brought an army here in the first place."

"Then I will question Latreille by myself!"

"Please don't do that!"

Eric pleaded with a screech, then spoke bluntly.

"Erm... Princess, that would be reckless. If Field Marshall Latreille was unscrupulous, this will be akin to putting one's head in the lion's mouth."

"I know."

While Altina was talking to Eric, two men walked towards the headquarters.

There was Eddie who had the title of Emperor Sword, and Abidal Evra, the leader of the Flying Sparrow Knights.



Although Eddie was assigned to stay at the fort, he had his own ideas about it and led the infantry that set off later and caught up with Altina.

“Yo!” He raised a hand in greeting.

“Argentina, how long do you plan to face off against them?”

“That’s what we are discussing. Eric said I can’t go question Latreille alone.”

“Isn’t that obvious? How can we send out the top commander out of the blue. At times like this, a messenger would normally be despatched.”

Altina opened her eyes wide.

“That surprised me... Eddie, you actually gave a proper opinion!?”

“I had some experience on the battlefield after all... Sigh, your words seem to imply you are looking down at me?”

Abidal Evra lowered his head.

“My terrible apologies. It is an 8 days journey from Fort Volks to the capital... I should have expected such a situation and proposed a way forward.”

We had 8 days of time, so why couldn't we decide on a plan? —— Altina reproached herself too.

“Hmmm... If Latreille mobilize his army, we will retaliate, how about that?”

Eric sighed.

“How can we attack them all of a sudden?”

“During civil war, it is common for both sides to remain at an impasse.”

Eddie nodded in agreement.

Altina pouted:

"T-Then there is nothing we can do!? I never fought a civil war before."

"I don't have experience either..."

In the eyes of the cautious Eric, Altina's action lacked careful thought and was full of risk.

That might be so, as an escort, he should avoid raising opinions that run contrary to the commander. And he couldn't think of any good ideas like Regis...

Eric shut his mouth.

Normally, Regis would control the flow of conversation at such a moment... But their discussion right now was running amok like an unreined wild horse.

At this moment, Eddie caught the tail of that horse.

"Anyway, I think we should send a messenger first?"

"Is that enough? Then we will send one... who should we send?"

Altina asked for the other's opinion.

Eddie took a step backwards.

"Not me. It will be a different story if this is a part of Regis' plan, but Latreille seem to have a personal vendetta against me."

"That's true. You are the one who escaped hand in hand from the palace with Auguste."

"Ehh... That's true."

Why are two grown men acting like this? —— Eric thought in his heart.

Although the First Prince Auguste was actually the Fifth Princess Felicia in disguise, so this wasn't an act between two men.

Not even the staff officers knew about the disguise. Eric only knew because he had seen through Felicia's crossdressing disguise.

Leaving that aside, Eric pointed out other issues.

"If we send Duke Eddie Fabio de Balzac who is famed as the best swordsman in the Empire, the other party might not be able to know if he is a messenger or to seek a one on one duel..."

"No no, I don't kill people."

Eddie hated blood flowing.

He didn't want to kill.

Even so, he didn't want to be killed either.

Hence, he trained and obtained powerful skills to suppressed others without dying or killing the other party. This was also thanks to his talent and the prowess of 'Defendre Sept'.

Altina crossed her arms.

"I won't let Eddie challenge them to duels!"

"No, I mean Field Marshall Latreille's side might misunderstand..."

"If it's a duel, then I should go!"

"I already said you can't!"

Telling a commander 'no' was overstepping his boundaries, an action taboo for escorts—— Despite that, Eric had to say it.

Altina waved her hand.

"I-I get it. I have grown a lot too, and know that I can't start a civil war without a proper rationale to support it."

"Please consider it seriously. The sun is going to set."

“Who do think should go, Eric?”

“... If you give the word, I will be happy to oblige.”

That won't do, Eddie shook his head.

“Eric is the escort officer, how can you leave the commander's side.”

“That's...”

“And Argentina likes you a lot. If you are despatched as a messenger and get killed by the other side, the commander will lose her cool. We can't allow that.”

“L-Like!?”

“Don't you spend a lot of time with her and Clarisse, and even act just like a maid?”

“I-I'm a man!?”

“Hahaha... That's true, but I can't help feeling this way.”

“P-Please don't say that, Lord Eddie.”

He wished that Eddie wouldn't touch the core question so nonchalantly.

Eric wiped away his cold sweat.

Altina tilted her head.

“Hmm—..... If we are sending a messenger, what should we tell Latreille? Question him 'Did you kill Regis?'... What do we do if he says 'I didn't'?”

Eddie shrugged.

“If he said he didn't, doesn't mean he didn't?”

“That won't do at all!”

“Then what will you do, Argentina? Are you certain he is lying?”

“Well...”

Altina fell into deep thought.

She led her army here on the spur of the moment, but didn’t even think about how she would question Latreille.

Eric held his head.

“Ahh, if only Sir Regis is here...”

“That’s right, if only Regis is here! But, he claims Regis is dead with just a lousy piece of paper... That’s unbelievable right!?”

“That’s... true...”

“He is a one of a kind strategist. The hero that saved the Empire... How did it turn out this way, Prince Latreille?”

Eddie sighed.

The battle of Grebauvar fortress city was a siege which they won. Even though their headquarters wasn’t assaulted, Regis who was a strategist died in battle—— It was natural to feel this was an assassination.

Suddenly, Abidal Evra pointed to the north

“Hmm? An infantry unit is approaching our flank....? Could it be a sneak attack!?”

“What!?”

Altina looked over hurriedly.

A unit was indeed heading towards them while kicking up a dust storm. They numbered about 700.

It wasn’t too numerous, but they couldn’t be ignored either.

If their flank was attacked and the soldiers fell into confusion, they would be routed if the First Army used this chance to charge them.

However, their frontlines would be thinned if they send too many troops to the wings.

Altina's mind was a mess.

"Ugh~ Send 700 infantry to intercept!"

"We are matching their numbers!? Your Highness, our formation will crumble if they break through our flanks!"

When she heard Abidal Evra's advice, she reconsidered.

"Twice the number then."

"1,400 it is, understood. We will draw 400 men from the unit at the front!"

"Yes!"

"Wait!" Eddie shouted.

"It doesn't look like a surprise attack."

"Eh?"

On second glance, that unit was hoisting a white flag.

Surrender. Or maybe, a messenger.

Eric felt troubled and said:

"What is going on? It is hard to imagine sending 700 men to be messengers."

"And they seem to be mercenaries?"

Eddie muttered. He had great eyesight.

After they came closer, Altina could tell from their equipment too. Their weapons and

armour were a chaotic mixture, not like an imperial unit.

"They do... look like mercenaries?"

"In that case, we can't let our guard down even if they have a white flag."

Abidal Evra remarked.

There were many mercenaries that acted just like bandits.

On the battlefield, it was prohibited to launch a surprise attack after raising a white flag or pretending to be casualties.

However, bandits wouldn't care about such rules. They didn't belong to the military, and was a criminal organization.

"... No."

Altina said softly.

Though she didn't understand why, her mind was filled with a strange sense of nostalgia.

"... Could it be, Regis?"

Ehh!? The people around her yelled in surprise.

Shortly after, they realized that Altina's instinct proved to be correct.

CHAPTER 1

THUNDERCLAP

Four hours ago—

Regis felt really blissful now.

On the morning of the 12th, the newspaper with the testimony of Royal Chamberlain Beclard was published.

The capital turned rowdy when this serious allegation appeared suddenly before the coronation.

A lot of citizens pressed the palace for answers but no one from the administration stood up to clarify the situation.

Everything was going just as planned.

Regis was immersed in his book as he sipped coffee inside the beverage section of Carol's bookshop.

His letter should reach Fort Volks in another few days. On it was news that Regis was still alive and the plans from now on, written in code.

So he could spend his days peacefully for now — at least that was his plan.

Fanrine came running in a panic.

“Sir Regis!”

“Sigh... Please don't do that, you're too loud!?”

“Wahh, sorry! Ms Regina, something terrible is happening!”

In order to hide his identity within the capital, Regis was still crossdressing. Even though he could leave the capital now, he still went to the bookshop and immersed himself in it with the excuse of collecting information. If he could read, he wouldn't

mind crossdressing.

“... What’s the matter, Ms Fanrine? Is there anything more terrifying than being lectured loudly by the bookshop owner?”

“Princess Argentina’s cavalry has formed up on the hill to the east of the capital!”

“Wh—— What!”

His blissful time lasted less than half a day.

They then rushed back towards the basecamp of 《Renard Pendu》 .

By the way, the third prince Bastian, his friend Elize, the activist Bourgine, news reporter Claude, the injured Franziska and her younger sister Martina stayed behind in the capital.



Basecamp——

Jessica who was leading the mercenaries glared at Regis.

Her face was beautiful, but there was a shroud of intimidation in her expression.

“Lord Auric, you’re late. The sun is almost setting.”

“W-Well, I already informed you of the situation on my side via mail... Didn’t you receive them yet?”

“You probably just want to read books anyway.”

“Ugh...”

They only met for a short time, but she saw right through him. Her title of ‘Magician’ wasn’t just for show. Her observation skills were even better than Regis’.

She laid out the map.

“The fourth army has 500 cavalry, and the 4000 infantry behind them have formed up at the hill to the east... The First Army’s 《White Hare Knight》 is positioned at the bottom of the hill.”

“When I left the city, I saw them mustering the infantry. The First Army will probably send out 10,000 soldiers. Maybe they had already moved out? After all, we left from the other side of the capital and made a detour here, so we took quite a long time.”

“Is Princess Argentina trying to start a civil war?”

“No way...”

“It’s your problem though?”

“Well, I already mailed out a letter... From the situation here, they probably missed it.”

“What should we do? Watch from the sidelines?”

“We can’t do that! Let’s link up with the princess.”

Jessica was probably expecting Regis to say that and nodded.

“As promised, we will aid you.”

The mercenaries were already prepared to set off, and could do so immediately.

Regis was adamant on going even if he had to go alone, so he gladly accepted their help.

After leaving the basecamp, they headed for the eastern hills.

They were about 700 strong.

Regis, Fanrine and Jessica sat together inside a shaky carriage. It goes without saying that Regis couldn't ride a horse.

The driver said:

“Deputy commander, the Fourth Army is in sight!”

“What should we do, Lord Auric?”

“Please raise the white flag! We will be attacked if we continue to advance like this.”

“Aye Sir!”

Fortunately, the First Army didn't make any moves, and Regis' group reached the Fourth Army safely.

No, it wasn't certain that things would end safely yet...

The soldiers of the Fourth Army raised their lances and raised their bows against the mercenaries they had never seen before.

One false move and they would probably be attacked.

Regis alighted from their box carriage.

He recognized some of the soldiers.

If they noticed Regis, they would probably report to Altina.

Regis waved.

Those soldiers blushed.

Their reaction was different from what he expected.

Even though they were the Fourth Army's soldier he knew.

He thought the mood would be like returning home, but something seems off.

As if he went into the wrong house.

Fanrine who was standing behind him whispered:

"... Sir Regis, your attire!"

"Ahh?!"

He completely forgot. Regis didn't look like a strategist right now. Even sharp eyed reporters couldn't see through his disguise.

But what would the soldiers think if he took off his wig here...

The column of imperial soldiers parted.

Someone walked forth from the depths of the unit.

Her fiery vermillion hair swayed, and a sword larger than her body was hung on her shoulder. Crimson eyes stared Regis' way.

"...Regis?"

"Sigh... A-Altina!"

"Regis! Regis! Regis! Regis! Regis!"

The young girl sprinted over and caught him in an embrace.

With all her might——

“Croak”, Regis made a sound like a frog being squashed.



Headquarters of the Imperial Fourth Army——

There were 6 people in the tent.

They were Regis, Altina, Eddie, Abidal Evra, Jessica and Fanrine. Eric stood guard at the entrance.

Altina who had finally calmed down glared at Regis.

He was getting glared by ladies all day.

“Well? What happened? Regis who is supposed to have died in battle according to Latreille’s report turned into a woman and is together with the mercenaries who were our enemy... Ah, I don’t get this at all!”

“... Yes, you have a point.”

It was natural for her to be confused.

Regis’ expression relaxed when he saw Altina like this.

“What, why are you all smiles!?”

“Eh? Do I really look like that? How troubling...”

“Does seeing me troubled amuse you so much?”

“... I’m just happy about seeing you again.”

“What!?”

Altina's face turned beet red.

Wahaha, Eddie laughed.

"That's a great line! I will say this to that person after I return to Fort Volks."

His beloved Fifth Princess stayed behind in the fortress.

Regis said in a panic:

"Wahh... N-No, that's not what I mean...!!"

"You have a way with words after becoming a woman, Regis."

"Please don't tease me, Lord Eddie."

After the conversation became like this, a cold voice interjected:

"... Is it fine to be this relaxed? The sun is setting. Do you want to continue this stand off?"

Jessica asked in a cold tone as usual.

Regis smiled wryly.

"... It's true that there isn't any reason for this stand off. We should let the soldiers sleep in a warm place tonight. Anyone has pen and paper?"

A maid entered the tent.

As if she knew what Regis needed, a full set of stationery was placed on the tray.

Regis gasped.

"Ah..."

"....."

Clarisse was the one who placed the tray on the table.

When others were present, she would be expressionless. Despite that, Regis still noticed that the corners of her eyes were a little red, and there were tear stains.

A smile appeared on Regis' face.

"Thank you. Ms Clarisse. Erm... I'm back."

"..... Yes. Welcome back."

She then added 'Sir Regis' in a barely audible voice. After bowing deeply, she left the tent as if nothing had happened.

Altina shrugged.

"Even though it's been a long time since you two met, shouldn't you speak a little more?"

"... It's fine."

The joy of finding him safe meant much more than words.



Regis picked up the pen.

— *This is the one I have always been using.*

The grip felt familiar. This was the pen usually used which was left behind in Fort Volks.

Even though the death notification was received and the army mobilized, Clarisse still believed. Believed that Regis was still alive, and the time when he will use this pen will come again.

Or maybe, she wanted to lay it besides his grave...

Regis thought about this as he started writing.

He finished in no time, scrolled the letter up and used stamp Altina's seal on the wax.

Jessica remarked coldly again:

"You have no hesitation in using the Princess' seal."

"Haha... Because Altina will fail once in every three times she seal a letter."

"You even used a nickname."

"I hope you don't misunderstand..."

Regis actually said "Altina" in the presence of so many people.

It would be bad if this start a weird rumour amongst the troops, so he would address her formally in public. However, the staff officers in the Fourth Army already knew about their relationship.

"I'm just Altina's strategist. We're just not used to being too formal with each other."

"I'm used to others speaking to me formally though."

His words were unexpectedly refuted.

“U... Huh?”

“But since it’s Regis, I allowed it.”

“... T-Thank you.”

“I did ask you to be my strategist, but I also hope you can be my comrade with the same goal in mind.”

“Yes... I feel the same way. To share the same dream.”

Jessica nodded.

“... I understand the special relationship between the two of you.”

“It’s a bit hard to explain.”

“It’s fine. At least, I can tell you two are not lovers.”

“I-Is that so?”

“Just who do you think I am?”

As expected of the renown strategist of the mercenary band 《Renard Pendu》 .

Abidal Evra frowned.

“Well... There is no question that Sir Auric is an exceptional talent. But neglecting the proper protocol is a bit...”

Eddie patted his shoulder.

“It’s fine! They just need to keep their act together during ceremonies and duties.”

“War conference is also part of their duties though.”

“It’s fine since Argentina wants it to be so. Regis will feel more relaxed too right? Instead of protocol, unity is more important.”

"I-Indeed..."

If they change their way of doing things and Regis' capability is restricted, then the future of the Fourth Army would be doomed.

Regis lowered his head.

"My apologies, it's all my fault."

Abidal Evra frowned again.

"Ugh... Sir Auric, I understand the rationale why you don't use honorifics when addressing the princess. In that case, can you do so when you speak with me? I feel that I am the one who should be apologizing for offending you earlier."

"Ahahaha... I will do my best... No, I will give it my best shot yo."

Altina got back on topic.

"Have you finished the letter?"

Speaking of which, Regis only said 'We should let the soldiers sleep in a warm place tonight'.

"Yes, this is for Prince Latreille."

"So we need to send an envoy? We already thought about that. But who should we send?"

"Eh?? Anyone will do."

"Really!?"

"It's just this bit of distance, so a new recruit will do."

"How should we question Latreille? Like 'did you murder Regis' or something? Ah, speaking of which, he didn't."

After all, Regis was still alive and kicking before her.

Regis said with an awkward smile:

"No... I think he already tried. If not, news of me dying in battle wouldn't have spread."

"Ah, is that so!?"

"Well, let's talk about this later... First is the matter of the envoy. At this distance, we can just pass the letter to them directly. They can reply via mail too."

"Is that so?"

"Sorry, it's my mistake. I should have assigned someone familiar with this as your deputy. For the Fourth Army, that would be Lord Edvard."

"Ahh, I see."

Although he had assumed the post of fort defence commander for now, he was actually an experienced veteran. He was also a trusted lieutenant of Jerome, so he should be familiar with negotiations too.

They couldn't spend all day talking.

Regis summoned a messenger soldier, and instructed him to deliver the letter to the Imperial First Army.

Altina tilted her head.

"What did you write?"

"Eh?! Didn't I show it to you before I seal it with wax?!"

"Ahaha... I was only looking at Regis."

"I-I see."

Regis started to blush.

"I was wondering if you were actually translucent."

“I’m not a ghost.”

Ahaha, Altina and Eddie laughed.

Abidal Evra probably wasn’t used to their interactions and appeared a little tense. Jessica probably guessed what Regis wrote, and just sipped on her tea without appearing bothered.

Eric continued his guard duty without moving.

Fanrine who was seated at the end of the table raised a hand.

“I’m curious too. What did you write, Sir Regis?”

“Well... The first part is about me. “I had to leave the battlefield because of pressing matters, and sincerely apologize for any inconvenience caused to the Field Marshal and commander of the First Army.” I also wrote that I have made it back to the Fourth Army safely.”

“You didn’t mention anything about them listing you as killed in action?”

“Even if we don’t complain about this, they will still apologize and correct the records. After all, people being listed as killed in action when they are actually alive happens occasionally.”

“But Prince Latreille attempted to assassinate you.”

“I don’t have any evidence.”

Or rather, if they delve deeper into the matter, the fact that mercenaries from 《Renard Pendu》 had killed the sentries would be uncovered.

There was no point in pursuing this matter.

Altina smiled:

“But this will definitely shock Latreille — receiving a letter from Regis whom he thought he had killed! It’s a pity I won’t be able to see his reaction!”

“I don’t think he will leave the palace. During his duel against High Britannia’s colonel Coulthard he sustained injuries so bad that he couldn’t even ride a horse. It would take about two months before he can make a full recovery.”

“What?!”

“Seemed like this news didn’t spread in the army. He probably didn’t want to delay the coronation. Prince Latreille seemed really anxious about this.”

“Tomorrow is the coronation...”

“The Imperial Fourth Army is here to congratulate him—— That’s what I wrote.”

Altina frowned.

“Why must I congratulate him!?”

“... I have to find a reason for mobilizing the unit without orders.”

“It’s the fault of Latreille who gave me fake news in the first place!”

“You want to report that to the Ministry of Military Affairs?”

“Ugghh...”

She looked enraged, but suppressed her emotions. *She had grown after I was forced to leave her*—— Regis thought.

Although he wished she was composed enough to collect intel before mobilizing the army...

“Well, this situation isn’t completely meaningless.”

“What do you mean?”

“The people in the capital... especially the nobles. We can draw their attention through the existence of the Fourth Army, which will be beneficial for us in the future.”

"Regis, you are showing a devilish face again."

"Really? I can't act like a nice guy either. They almost killed me after all."

"Yes! Ah, by the way, something is bothering me very much."

"What?"

Altina reached her hand out.

And touched his hair.

"Why are you dressed like a girl? Clarisse laughed so hard that she cried."

So those weren't tears of joy from meeting me again!?

He finally knew why the corner of Clarisse's eyes were red.

"No... This is..."

Jessica said softly:

"... Lord Auric asked me to help him crossdress."

"T-That isn't wrong, but putting it that way will lead to misunderstandings!?"

Kekeke... Fanrine tried her best not to laugh.

With no other choice, Regis had to recount his ordeal from the beginning.



Imperial First Army, Field Tent—

When the sun was about to set behind the western hills, a rider hoisting a messenger flag came running.

Germain spoke. As he served as Latreille's eyes, he had the habit of reporting what he sees.

“Prince Latreille, it seems to be a messenger.”

“Hmm.”

His right eye's vision had recovered, but his left eye remains blind. And the doctor diagnose that his right eye will lose its light one day.

Germain asked:

“Could this be the Fourth Army's declaration of war? Or will they question us about the death of their strategist?”

“No, that won't be.”

Latreille sat in his chair.

There were narrow but deep stab wounds in his left shoulder and right thigh. He shouldn't be allowed to leave the bed—— according to doctor orders.

He couldn't even ride a horse, and had to travel by carriage.

Germain tilted his head.

“What would the letter be about?”

“That small group linking up with them earlier... You mentioned that they look like mercenaries? In that case, it can be explained why that strategist can travel through the mountains with a woman in tow.”

“Ah!”

“The content will probably say that their strategist Regis is still alive.”

“But if Sir Regis is still alive... it will still be a war declaration then?”

“They want to defeat the Imperial First Army with just that much people? We have another 50,000 men in the capital.”

"T-That... That is true..."

"Don't be afraid. No matter how great a strategist he is, he won't be able to turn things around with such a small force. If this turns into a civil war, the only ones who will benefit are the neighbouring nations. It won't come to war. That's impossible."

He dismissed that notion firmly, but Latreille himself wasn't entirely convinced.

As if he was saying this for his own sake too.

This was probably because he witnessed Regis' extraordinary strategy and command during the battle of Grebauvar.

Regis could come up with strategies beyond imagination—— Latreille couldn't dismiss this doubt.

Shortly after, the envelope arrived.

Germain took the letter and opened it. The content could be read easily in the day, but it would take quite a bit of effort to see it clearly at dusk.

"I-It's as you say! It says that Regis d'Auric is still alive!"

"As expected huh..."

Germain continued reading it.

"He then apologized for inconveniencing you, Prince Latreille. He then said that the Fourth Army are here to congratulate your coronation."

"Hmmp... Excuses."

"What should we do?"

"It might be excuses, but we can't investigate the Fourth Army. And since I'm about to take the throne, avoiding a civil war is just what I am hoping for."

"Indeed... 500 cavalries and 4000 infantry might be too grand an entourage for the Princess, but it can still be explained away since there are still remnants of the High

Britannia Army within our borders."

If they used the reason that the Empire was still a battlefield, there would be no way to refute them.

Latreille said grudgingly:

"... It is the failure of the Field Marshal that High Britannia invaded so deep into our territory."

The letter didn't mention all this, but it would be brought to light if they tried to refute the content of the letter. Since the other party thought this far, it would not be possible to fault them.

Latreille clicked his tongue in his heart.

As expected of that strategy, this tactic was as brilliant as before. He already thought out the ways to counter any of Latreille's accusations.

Germain asked:

"How should we respond?"

"... Express our jubilance in learning that First Grade Admin Officer Regis d'Auric is still alive, and apologize for the mistake in our earlier report. Then compliment him for his contributions in the victorious battle of Grebauvar, and award him a medal. Invite Argentina to the coronation ceremony, and welcome the men of the Fourth Army — — we have no choice but to say that."

That would be conceding to all the demands from the other party.

Latreille clenched his fist.

Germain placed his hand on top of that fist.

"Please calm down, Prince Latreille... I think this is a good response. It will be hard on the Fourth Princess too, since she has to congratulate her political opponent on taking the throne, her heart must be as turbulent as a storm. At best, this is just her venting."

"I know. But the one who pushed me into this state is that strategist. He created this situation which I had to respond in this way."

"Please don't say that. Even when Sir Regis was acting in the dark inside the capital, the most he could pull off was unreliable fake news in newspapers. In the end, you are the one who will be emperor, Prince Latreille."

"Yes."

"In other words, since the Fourth Princess will be attending the ceremony, it will be clear to nobles who will be the emperor. Sir Regis is the one who should be troubled."

"You're right, Germain. I'm probably flustered because of my imminent coronation."

"You're just tired, my liege. Let's return to the palace after the letter is written. We will leave the rest to the 《White Hare Knights》 ."

"... Yes. For the sake of tomorrow, I will heed your words."

Latreille boarded the carriage and returned to the palace ahead of the others.

Under the command of Batteren from the 《White Hare Knights》 , the First Army also retreated slowly back to the capital. At the same time, the Fourth Army also headed into the capital.

The sudden need to take in 4500 soldiers meant that the logistics personnel were laden with work.

Just like what Regis said, the soldiers of the Fourth Army got to sleep somewhere warm.

The two units that was standing against each other in the day marched in two separate lines along the streets of the capital, which was a rare sight to behold.

The citizens who was worried about the outbreak of civil war welcome them with smile of relief.

People crowded the sidewalks as they watch the impromptu parade.



The next day——

It was raining, but that wouldn't stop the coronation.

Bourgine was once persecuted for giving a speech in this plaza in front of the palace. And now, an extravagant stage had been erected right in this plaza.

Heavy infantry in silver armour serving as guards and formed ranks.

“You’re late, newbie!”

A man with large ears and tanned skin yelled. He was the reporter Claude from Weekly Quarry. He had a flat leather cap, and wore a wrinkled suit.

A petite young girl ran over.

“How selfish! Please! Don’t leave me behind! Ha, ha...”

She also wore something like leather cap and a suit, but her skin was fair and eyes were blue. Her blonde hair was tied behind in a ponytail

Claude gave something to the girl.

“Wear this.”

It was a piece of wood with a stamp that could worn on the neck with its strings.

Claude was wearing it too.

“Senpai, what is this?”

“Press permit. Without it, we can’t even enter the place where we can see the nobles. By the way, if we queue normally, we probably can’t even hear Latreille give his coronation speech.”

“What a great crowd. As if everyone in the capital is here. Not just the plaza, even the streets are packed.”

“Retard. It’s just 100,000 or so people. The population of the Empire is many times of this.”

“That’s already incredible!?”

“Well... For this historical event of the century, it’s incredible that I’m pushing my junior who slept in.”

“T-that’s because senpai doesn’t let me sleep...”

The young girl blushed.

Claude gritted his teeth.

“Because your essays are too terrible, and we had to edit it late into the night! Alright, let’s go!”

Pushed forcibly from behind, the girl walk forward as if she was stumbling.

“Wahh! Really now... By the way, I’m impressed that you got us press passes.”

“Yeah.”

“Weekly Quarry is now synonymous with the anti-establishment movement stirring up in the capital. And you managed to get press passes... Sigh, oh no senpai. The name is wrong.”

“Is that so?”

“Look, my name’s Betty right? The name on it is wrong... Sigh, even the press name is wrong... Huh, senpai’s name is wrong too—?!”

“Don’t be so loud. There’s no way the Ministry of Ceremony will issue press passes to Weekly Quarry.”

“Is this a forgery...?”

“Are you retarded? How can this stamp be forged in a matter of hours?”

“Is this... stolen...?”

“Don’t be retarded. They loan these to us because they were moved by our conviction for our cause. So we have to make good use of it.”

“That’s a crime—?!”

“If you don’t like it, then go home. I will go alone.”

Claude held his hand out.

Betty dodged away.

“... O-On second thought, Senpai is the one who stole it, this has nothing to do with me. I want to see the ceremony, Prince Latreille is really dreamy.”

“Hah! We’re going to write a report that criticize him though.”

“I’m so excited.”

“... What a weirdo... Well, normal people won’t work at our place anyway.”

They mixed in with the other reporters and made it through the checkpoint.

Although the staff will check the press pass, they only give it a simple glance because of the overwhelming crowd size. And so, even crude replica could slip through security.

However, they would still conduct stringent checks for weapons.

Before the main gate of the palace was a lectern, and the nobles were seated right in front of it.

While the reporter’s zone were separated with a fence, in a position where they could see the lectern and the nobles from the side.

They could see everyone’s faces.

An ideal spot.

Although the heavy infantry standing before them were an eyesore...

“Move away! Or just sit down!”

When they heard the reporter’s angry roar, the guards squatted down in a panic, which was a little cute—— Betty thought.

The short Betty stood on her toes and looked towards the lectern.

“Hah... Prince Latreille isn’t there yet?”

“It’s raining after all, so he will wait in his room before the ceremony begins. Marquis Bergerac isn’t here yet after all.”

Claude would usually call those people by their name, but there were others watching, so he had to be more careful with his choice of words.

“Bergerac...?”

“Ughh... At least remember the name of the minister of ceremony.”

“Ahh, yes, I remember! He is the maternal grandfather of the third prince. Ahaha... I need to spend extra effort to remember things not related to hotties.”

“Really now...”

“It took me quite a while to remember things about senpai too—”

“Shut up..”

Claude squeezed to the front of the group of reporters.

As she was shorter, Betty pushed to the front right behind him.

Claude leaned forth from the barricade and pointed:

“Look at the nobles seating section.”

“How gorgeous and extravagant—”

“Do you remember their seating order?”

“Is there any meaning behind that?”

“The seats to the right have the highest status, and it goes down behind in that order. The order of their seating is the result of the ferocious power struggle between the aristocrats. We can see how influential they are from where they are seated.”

“Ohh, I see—”

“If the emperor changes, the nobles he sides with will also change. And so, there will be a reshuffling of their order.”

Betty nodded in agreement.

She wanted to make notes, but couldn’t do so because of the other reporters pushing from behind.

They could only talk like this because Claude was grabbing the fence and acting like a shield. If she was alone, she would have been squashed.

“The one at the very front should be the royals right?”

“Aside from them, there are the current ministers. They have special privileges, but they won’t side with the emperor, but with the nobles.”

“Eh—, the ministers are there too?”

“The ministers are representatives of the nobles after all. Things will get complicated if the emperor dismisses a minister without strong reasons. Not only would it hinder the administration of the empire, it might even spark off a civil unrest.”

“I see.”

“They are super grand nobles that couldn’t be taken lightly after all. Oh, look! That’s Princess Argentina!”

“Wahh! I’m her fan!”

The appearance of the person only second in prominence to the emperor whipped the other reporters into a frenzy.

The mob pushed strongly from behind once again, and Claude’s arms started trembling.

Even the fence was creaking.

“Ughh...”

“Sempai, are you okay?”

“Yeah... Watch carefully. That vermillion haired girl became a Lieutenant General in the Imperial army at the age of 15, and is the heroine with the greatest war merits in the previous war...Princess Marie Quatre Argentina de Belgaria.”

“Amazing!”

“... Your vocabulary is too limited for a reporter. Never mind, the person beside her is even more amazing!”

“Ohh.”

“That’s First Grade Admin Officer Regis d’Auric, who is known as the Wizard. He is wearing men’s clothes today... Kukuku.”

A woman’s dress suits you better, Claude laughed.

Besides the Princess was a man in a formal attire. But his step was unsteadily, back hunched and didn’t seem to be reliable.

Betty tilted her head.

“That... That skinny man is Regis? Isn’t he the Princess’ porter?”

“Even though he is just a chevalier, that’s still a noble. You will address him as ‘Lord’.”

“Wah— My impression of him in my heart is crumbling—”

“Well, I felt the same way when I first met him... And besides him... Is the Emperor's sword, Duke Eddie Fabio de Balzac.”

“A hottie, amazing!”

“He disappeared after the founding day festival... So he's working for the Fourth Princess now huh.”

“What kind of person is he?”

“He is the top swordsman in the Empire, and never lost in a martial competition before. However, rumours says that he hates the battlefield.”

“Ehh—”

“He was working as the First Prince's escort... But the First Prince forfeit his claim to the throne and come out in support of the Fourth Princess, so Eddie should be in the Princess' faction. Just as I thought.”

“Prince Auguste seems to be absent.”

“There's no one with silver hair around.”

“There's someone with brown hair though.”

The other reporters noticed too, and the crowd turned rowdy. Even the nobles were noticeably shocked.

Claude sighed.

“Are you serious... That's the third prince Heinrich Trois Bastian de Belgaria! He actually declared that he is in the Princess' faction! And to do so on the coronation day, this is interesting!”

“Hmm? What's so interesting?”

"Think about it. The Second Prince Latreille is going to be emperor. Leaving smart people aside, even retard know that they should try to get into the new emperor's good books."

"I'm not a retard."

"I'm not talking about you. The Third Prince Bastian chose this day when the match has already been decided to stand at the Fourth Princess' side!"

"Maybe they just happened to come in from the same entrance."

"This isn't a bar somewhere?! If they aren't in the same faction, then they should enter separately."

"Is that so—"

"You don't understand huh? After his interview with us, he chose to stand in that position. Isn't that wonderful?"

"Ehh, is that true?!"

"Speaking of which, I haven't tell you the details. I will tell you about it when we return to the office."

"Hah..."

Betty nodded ditzily.

And they even managed to get a scope of something illegal and couldn't be reported.

Claude's mouth twisted and he showed a sinister smile.

"Kukuku... The new emperor Latreille will be setting sail in a storm huh? Since Prince Bastian supports Princess Argentina, that means the rumours of regicide... isn't completely baseless."

The aristocrats weren't getting unsettled over nothing.

Claude cast his gaze to Regis who was seated beside the Princess.

“... Is this part of your scheme too?”

Betty pointed and asked:

“Senpai, who are the nobles seated on the second row?”

“They are the nobles from around the capital —— Grand nobles from central. Latreille’s faction. Not only are they rich and powerful, the Prince they supported even became the Emperor. They are the happiest group here.”

“It feels uncomfortable that the strong became even mightier.”

“Next is the new nobles from the south. You know about the alliance of the new nobles 《The council of Gaillard's garden》 right?”

“O-Of course I know that.”

Betty’s eyes were wavering.

Claude sighed.

“I already told you to read the documents. They made use of the vast and fertile lands in the south and their trade with the southern nations to accumulate massive wealth.”

“They are loaded?”

“Yes, they will be a good opponent against the greedy and power hungry nobles in central. They might be in the Princess’ faction... but they’re ranked higher than the western nobles.”

“You mean the third faction?”

Claude nodded.

“They were considered the second faction during the times of the previous emperor... The influence of the old nobles of the west had waned. They might have the reputation and history, but the nobles there are poor. They suffered the heaviest losses in the war with High Britannia probably because their position was already weak.”

“Ah, that is true for the west.”

Nobles from other regions would be ranked behind these three main factions.

Those with the peerage of Vicomte and below, as well as Houses without much assets were not much different from commoners, and wouldn’t even have a seat.

Betty noticed something.

“Hmm? The eastern nobles aren’t here?”

“Because there are rumours saying that Latreille assassinated the 6th queen consort Johaprecia. There seems to be a war in the east.”

“Fufu... Aren’t we the ones who spread that rumour?”

“Hey, don’t let the people around us hear that?”

Claude said with a faint smile.

Looking again, there were empty seats amongst the grand nobles although many nobles craved for these front row seats.

“Is it because of the rain?”

“No... Because there are noble who are willing to risk Lèse-majesté, with the reason that “Latreille’s suspicion of regicide hasn’t been cleared yet”. They are people who are willing to fight a duel in order to defend their honour.”

“Speaking of which, the Empress is absent?”

“Hmm? Ahh... Betty, it’s about to begin. You have to remember the entire flow, and write them down later.”

“Leave it to me!”

What worries the ceremonial officials the most was the Empress.

She was Latreille's mother.

After the Weekly Quarry publicized Royal Chamberlain Marquis Beclard's testimony, the Empress disappeared.

And she has not been found til this day. Many people drew conjectures about the empty seat at the very front row.

The bugle announcing the beginning of the ceremony was blown. Drums were beaten in rhythm.

The solemn orchestra pulled open the curtains for the ceremony.



The waiting room inside a palace——

Latreille was in traditional formal wear, and waited silently for the coronation to begin.

Germain entered the room.

“... We still can't find the Empress.”

“Is that so. She won't be attending the ceremony then.”

“The commotion yesterday led to the lax in surveillance. My apologies.”

“What are you apologizing for? Am I a child who can't attend a ceremony without his mother?”

“No, not at all!”

Latreille whispered into Germain's ears.

“... That is a woman who will go as far as poisoning my elder brother in order to let her child succeed the throne. Keep your guard up. She is the most dangerous when she is in hiding.”

"Hmmm?! Yes my liege. I will bolster the search party."

"By an adequate amount. The top priority is the safety of the ceremonies attendees. It would be slight against my name if any of my guest are harmed during my coronation."

"Yes, I will keep that in mind!"

Germain left the waiting room after a bow.

Latreille was alone once more.

He opened the chest that contained his personal effects.

There was a palm-sized painting in there.

Painted on it was a black haired woman wearing an apron.

"Beatrice... I have... finally come this far..."

The door was knocked, and Latreille placed the painting back into the wooden chest.

The moment he left the palace, he heard the band playing. And the cheers of the people. The plaza and the streets were filled to the brim despite the rain.

He headed for the ceremonial stage.

And climbed the steps.

There were merely eight steps.

— How many people's blood stained his hand in order for him to climb these steps?

On the fourth step, he saw someone at the lectern.

"... Father."

It was the wrinkled figure of the previous emperor. With a sword thrust through his chest.

And of course, that was an illusion.

He was already buried six feet under.

It was the same for the 6th queen consort standing beside him.

“...Be gone, witch.”

He didn’t feel a shred of guilt towards the devil who was sucking the very life out of the empire —— Latreille believed this unwaveringly.

He climbed the steps again.

Stepping over the enemy generals he defeated.

And crushed the soldiers who died under Latreille’s command under his soles too.

On the seventh step, his leg trembled.

“... Auguste... Big brother.”

He saw his elder brother who was poisoned by his mother.

Auguste was smiling calmly, but black blood was dripping from his purple lips.

At this moment, the cheers from the crowd sounded like the vengeful wails from hell. Latreille’s brows were covered in sweat, which slid down his cheeks.

His feet wouldn’t move, as if he had stepped into a quagmire.

Latreille’s breathing turned ragged.

A voice shouted from behind him.

“Prince Latreille, lead the empire into everlasting prosperity!”

That man was Germain.

The illusions of the corpses all vanished.

Before his eyes was the stage, the nobles in attendance as well as the thunderous cheers of the people.

Latreille raised a hand in response.

“Of course!”

He stood at the lectern.

The cheer grew louder.

His gaze fell on the nobles who were present.

Almost all of them were dressed extravagantly and had faces filled with greed. Amongst them, only Argentina and the people around her had sharp gazes.

— *Even if you make such an expression, it is already too late.*

In the end, the Empress was absent.

Not because she was shunned, but because she sense danger.

The minister of ceremony, Bergerac came out, and announced the beginning of the coronation. Applause filled the air.

Bergerac was Bastian’s maternal grandfather. His face was pale as if he was about to faint, probably because he was too conscious about his grandson siding with Argentina.

The pope recited words of blessing to Latreille and crowned him.

The ceremony proceeded smoothly.

He could finally feel it physically.

Latreille raised his head and looked at the lead coloured sky as rain drops fell.

— Even if heaven doesn’t will it, I’m still the best candidate to be emperor. I will

prove that to everyone by becoming a snake that devours all other nations!

He declared:

“Only the Belgaria empire has the right to call itself the only superpower in these lands! When there are no more enemies to fight, I promise that I will bring you all everlasting peace and prosperity. Follow my lead! I will bring you victory!”

He raised his fist.

Cheers erupted in the crowd.

“Vive le nouvel Empereur! Vive le nouvel Empereur!”

The band started playing and the citizens sang the national anthem.

Imperial Year 851, August 13th—

The new emperor of the Belgaria Empire, Allen Deux Latreille de Belgaria was coronated.

CHAPTER 2

BANQUET

After the coronation ceremony ended, the celebratory banquet began.

A grand feast and extravagant decor filled the main hall of the Imperial palace Le Branne.

Red cloth were draped on the walls, lined with golden and silver threads. Marble statues held vases that came from the east, with massive flowers that had never been seen before.

Paintings and sculpture could be seen everywhere, which awed all those in attendance. Many of these art pieces were more than a century old, which coincide with the time when Belgaria's art and culture was thriving.

The orchestra played a gorgeous tune.

The nobles were dressed adequately for this banquet, making this feel like an exhibition of dresses and gems.

Regis was led here by Altina.

“... This... is amazing.”

“Yes, it’s a party on the level of the Founding Day festival——”

“Are you fine with these clothes?”

Altina was wearing a military uniform right now. It wasn’t her usual light armour, but dress uniform for formal functions which includes a small sword by her waist.

“Because I don’t think of myself as a Princess, but a lieutenant general of the imperial army right now.”



Since Latreille had inherited the throne, Altina lost her succession rights. Unless there are any exceptional situation, this would be the traditional custom of Belgaria.

She was depressed earlier, but she has gotten over it. Her path to the throne has been sealed, but she had not given up on her dreams.

Compared to being a princess without any succession rights, she probably feel that her position as a lieutenant general was more valuable.

Regis thought—— *Even if Altina is a commoner, she will still do her very best to achieve her dream.*

However, there isn't any doubt that the situation has grown even more difficult. And it has come to this because Regis himself was too timid and taking things too easily, at least that was how he thought.

—— *I won't hesitate any more.*

If he don't act decisively, he would lose the chance that Altina has. Regis was painfully aware of this fact.

Altina's eyes were suddenly drawn to an exhibit, and she ran over.

“Regis, look!”

“I thought it's rare to see you being interested in an art piece... So that's how it is.”

Displayed over there was a long sword with red and gold as its base colours.

The sheath had been removed, and placed in the center.

The blade was glittering as if it was made from gold. However, gold was a soft metal, and wouldn't be used to forge blades.

“Is this is an imperial sword...? Legend says that the founding emperor 『L'Empereur Flamme』 received Tristei from the fairies, and forged seven swords from them. From its golden blade, this should be the 『Rage Volcan Six』 correct?”

“This is the first time I have seen this.”

“That’s true, it has not been taken out from the treasury for a long time.”

“It looks weak.”

“No no no... It might look more fanciful and less practical than the other imperial swords, there are still records of it being used in the war.”

“What’s so special about this sword?”

“I think it needs to be used together with a shield. Such sword techniques can’t be found in the Belgraria empire now.”

“Eh—”

Altina crossed her arms.

“Hmm... The mood is getting grandiose, I feel really vexed.”

“Haha... Isn’t that good?”

“It’s not good. Did Latreille’s interest change after becoming emperor? I thought he is someone who hated splurging on extravagant parties.”

Regis surveyed the hall again.

“Indeed, this party is as extravagant as the times when emperor Vicente who is known as an art connoisseur is reigning.”

There were many paintings that depicts the scenes from that period after all.

Emperor Vicente really loves art, and made major contributions for cultural development. However, it couldn’t be denied that his splurging ways shook the very foundations of the country.

Altina frowned.

“Even though Latreille is always on campaign and fighting wars, he knows a lot about art. He was close to his elder cousin, I think she was a painter...”

“Huh? Cousin?”

“The daughter of his mother’s brother.”

“She’s not a royal then. But she would still be a grand noble. Who is that?”

“Her name? Well... I forget. Bea... Bea? Hmm... Well, that painter cousin often talks to Latreille about art.”

“Is that true? If the emperor’s cousin is a painter, she will be famous if she has a bit of skill. But I never heard of her.”

“Ahh... Because she passed away a long time ago...”

“I see...”

In this era, not just royals and aristocrats, people from other social hierarchy will have many siblings. If their relatives were added in, that would be a substantial number.

Female painters were rare, but she passed away before leaving behind any famous works, so there weren’t any books about her. Regis might have seen her name as someone who was close to the royals, but even he couldn’t recite those dull passages.

Regis looked at the art exhibit on display.

“..... Maybe the art exhibits are connected to the banquet in some way?”

“Who knows? Maybe succeeding the throne made him that happy.”

“His face during the ceremony didn’t look that happy. He look as if he was giving a speech before a major war.”

The speech given by the new emperor Latreille gave Regis a feeling that he was declaring war against the neighbouring nations.

That was why Regis couldn’t dismiss the doubt he felt towards this extravagant banquet that felt like a waste. There should be a deeper reason behind this.

A middle aged gentleman bowed to them and spoke:

“Pardon me.”

They thought he was a noble that came to greet Altina, but that wasn’t so.

“I’m an art merchant from the capital...”

“Art merchant?”

“Yes. If you are interested, please allow me to give a brief explanation of the paintings over here.”

“Eh— he even prepared such services.”

“It might be uncommon in such parties, but it’s the norm during art exhibition.”

“Is that so, Regis?”

Regis tilted his head in response to Altina’s question:

“I have never been to an art exhibition, so I’m not sure about that.”

“Is that so. You’re a young soldier, so maybe you are not interested in such things. This painting is safe kept in the treasury within the palace because it is commissioned by Emperor Vicente to the painting saint Philip, and took three years to complete...”

He was probably explaining this to Altina, so Regis didn’t interrupt him.

He never went to an art exhibition in the past not because of a lack in interest, but because his status as a commoner and meagre wage meant he couldn’t afford the entrance fee nor was he qualified to attend one.

There were many stories that used art pieces as the subject, and it gave him the urge to see these work for himself sometimes...

After hearing the art merchant’s explanation, Altina sighed:

“Eh— So it’s such an amazing work. I thought it was no different from the paintings

hanging in the palace.”

There actually isn't much difference —— Regis threw these words in his heart into the trashcan.

After all, the palace Le Brane had often been praised as an art gallery, and Altina had already gotten used to the top notch art pieces of the world.

The art merchant lowered his voice:

“... This is a secret... There's rumours that the new emperor Latreille will put up all the art pieces displayed during the banquet for sale.”

“Ah, is that so?”

Altina answered disinterestedly.

Regis realized the implication:

“I see, so that's what this is. This banquet is held for the sake of raising funds for the military.”

That explains the extravagant decor. A stingy party wouldn't be able to spur the interest of the nobles.

The art merchant nodded with a smile.

“Each and every piece is a national treasure, and whoever obtains one would become the talk of the social world. It would be hard to imagine its value dropping in the future, and buying it would put you in the new emperor's good books.”

“Hmmp... I won't feel happy even if I get into Latreille's good books!”

“I-Is that so... H-Haha...”

When he heard Altina saying something that would be guilty of *lèse-majesté* if one wasn't a royal, the face of the art merchant turned pale.

And of course, the art merchant already know who the banquet attendees were. And

he only came to chat because he knew that she was a Princess.

Normal nobles wouldn't buy paintings on the level of national treasures, so he needed to speak to the right people.

However, he didn't seem to understand Altina's personality yet.

She wasn't the type to grovel after losing a political struggle.

"Regis, it's just selling a few paintings, is it really meaningful?"

"That's true..."

Regis asked the art merchant for the price quietly.

"... It costs that much?"

"I am very sorry. A famous painting like this should actually cost twice that amount... But as a service to my dear customer, we can talk about this further."

Since the conversation had come to this, there was no way a deal will be made. However, his merchant spirit made him eager to continue the business negotiation.

Anyway, the price wasn't too far from what Regis imagined.

He felt sorry about misleading the art merchant, so Regis left the gallery with Altina after a bow.

Regis went back to the topic.

"Ara, it's a big amount! If half of the exhibits here are sold, it will almost make up for the Empire's losses during the war with High Britannia."

"Eh!? It's that much!?"

"It's national treasure level works after all, of course it is valuable enough to have an effect on the national budget."

Money obviously couldn't bring back dead soldiers or buy proper troops immediately.

He meant the salary of hiring and training new recruits.

However, it wouldn't be so easy to off load such expensive art pieces...

Altina sighed:

"If I didn't just get the treasure sword, but a few paintings too back then—"

"Hahaha... Even if Altina tries to sell these paintings, I don't think the grand nobles will buy them. Didn't the art merchant already mentioned? It's only meaningful to buy it off the hands of the new emperor."

"Which means, they're only buying because it's a form of flattery?"

"The aristocrats are skilled in doing this."

"Then just make them give money directly. Now that I think about it, those paintings are so pitiful."

Regis didn't think it was pitiful.

He said with an awkward smile:

"If he took their funds without offering something of equal value, that would be expropriation."

"Isn't that what nobles do to commoners?"

"That might be so... But if the emperor imposed a policy of collecting high levies, the nobles would lose face. It wouldn't go as far as to incite civil war, but the imperial defence forces is composed of the noble's private army right now. For the new emperor Latreille who wish to enact hegemonism, he definitely doesn't want to lose the support of the nobles."

The Belgaria Emperor was the man with absolute authority.

But the nobles were the one who owns most of the troops and lord over most of the citizens.

Although the nobles wants to be in the Emperor's good grace, the Emperor couldn't overlook the feelings of the nobles either.

And this unhealthy state of affairs had been ongoing for centuries.



The band played the same music as the ceremony, and the new emperor Latreille appeared.

The nobles formed into rows in order to bow to him.

It was the same as the founding day festival.

Latreille said at the podium.

"I already said during my coronation that I plan to expand the Belgaria Empire's territory. To devour the neighbouring countries and build a super nation without any enemies."

The nobles gave a round of applause.

Regis watched on from a corner of the hall.

Altina sighed.

"Don't they understand? Latreille wants to start many wars, but do the aristocrats have the will to follow through?"

"... It can't be helped. Even if someone opposes the new emperor's policy here, that person will just get ostracized amongst the nobles."

"Didn't we almost lose the war with High Britannia!?"

She was speaking very loudly, and a few nobles cast a sideway glance her way.

The face of the nobles seem to be saying "Which house's retarded daughter is she?", but when they realized it was the commander of the Fourth Army, they turned their head back in a panic.

They only won the previous war because of the outstanding performance of the Fourth Army, and that fact was well known.

Regis gestured her to keep her volume down.

“... But we still won in the end.”

“It’s all thanks to you. Isn’t that right?”

“No, you overestimate my importance. Even if I wasn’t there, someone else will lead the Empire to victory. The Belgaria Empire is that powerful.”

As always, Regis evaluate himself very poorly.

If I can minimize the casualties some more —— That was how he thinks.

Altina pouted:

“I don’t think the Belgaria Empire is strong. High Britannia only has 30,000 soldiers, but we lost so many men.”

“... The aristocrats feel the same way. That’s why they think of Latreille’s speech as a way to express his attitude, and is more like a goal he wants to strive for. It will be strange for him to make a timid speak right after his coronation.”

“But it’s that Latreille we are talking about? He is a man who will start a war if he say so.”

“... It’s hard for people to understand values which differs from themselves.”

He wouldn’t hesitate in sacrificing himself for the sake of his dream—— From this perspective, Latreille and Argentina was similar. Most of the nobles were satisfied with their current situation, so this was beyond their imagination.

The nobles were still clapping.

Latreille who was on the podium nodded.

"I am happy that everyone agrees with me. However... We have lost many men in the last war. There are some who feel uneasy that I'm in power now. It might be a little inelegant to say this in the presence of the ladies... But let me show everyone my secret plan."

He signalled with his gaze, and Germain came up to the podium.

In his arms were a rod-like object covered in white cloth.

He carefully took off the white cloth.

The nobles waiting in anticipation started chattering.

It was a rifle.

It was the rifle made in the Belgarian Empire which Regis saw some days ago. Even though that was just a prototype.

"The High Britannia had the upper hand in their war against us because the previous emperor doesn't concern himself with military affairs, leading to a large gulf in weapons. However, the empire has as many skilled crafters as there are stars, and the mass production of the new rifles are within our grasp!"

Woooahhhh, the noble men cheered once more.

Ladies couldn't discuss politics or military matters after all.

Altina also said loudly:

"He has a rifle!"

"I know, but the emperor is in the middle of his speech..."

"But...!!"

"I know what is on your mind. But we are not here to pick a fight."

Regis soothed Altina to calm her.

Latreille's empire-made rifles were better than the neighbouring nations, and he promised to loan them to the nobles for a cheap price.

Most of the nobles were happy about the war that haven't started, but they felt they had already won.

But there were some whose expression were gloomy.

"It's actually a loan..."

Be it sword, spears or armour, weapons were all forged by craftsmen they hired or bought from merchants. This had been the norm until today. However, the system of the country manufacturing weapons and loaning it out to the noble army felt wrong.

My guess is right—— Regis thought.

Latreille's endgame was to abolish the noble army and nationalize the armed forces.

But if he abolish them out of the blue, the nobles would not obey the order. A private army was mandatory for them to maintain their special privilege.

Nationalizing the manufacture of rifles and ammunition was the starting point to nationalizing the army.

He knew that, but he couldn't tell that to the nobles. Regis himself also think that abolishing the noble army was a necessary path for peaceful diplomacy with other countries.

At this point, everyone thought Latreille's speech had ended——

"Recently... because of the advent of technology, some fools are able to publish their views to society, and spread baseless rumours."

If he felt that the source wasn't reliable, he could just ignore them. But Regis didn't expect him to say that.

Because Latreille didn't give a specific name, he realized that the subject of his scorn was the Weekly Quarry.

And the rumours —— He dismissed them as being baseless.

For an instant, Regis felt Latreille's gaze pierced through him.

“Eh!?”

Was he mistaken? Latreille was already emperor, so why would Latreille pay attention to someone like himself, that shouldn't be...

When Regis was thinking that, Altina tilted her head.

“Why is he glaring this way?”

“Ah, he really is looking this way?”

“He is doing that so obviously. Is he unhappy about Regis still being alive?”

He wasn't mistaken after all.

Regis covered his mouth with his hand, and whispered to Altina besides him.

“... Do you know that the Weekly Quarry published news about the testimony of Chief Chamberlain Beclard one day before his coronation?”

“I don't know what magazine that is, but that sounds pretty interesting.”

“I did that.”

“... Huh?”

“I forged Lord Germain's signature, brought Maquis Beclard out from his mansion, and printed his testimony onto the newspaper.”

“What!?”

“It wasn't enough to stop him from taking the throne, but this will set the pieces for our counter attack.”

Altina stared right at Regis.

“Y-You already planned this far, but you didn’t realized that you are being glared at, that’s amazing in another sense!?”

“Ughh... No... Well... Someone like me isn’t much different from a pebble by the roadside right? Or maybe even less than that.”

“What does Regis think about that suspicious case?”

“After interviewing Marquis Beclard directly, I am no longer suspicious, but certain.”

“That means!”

“... But there’s no evidence. And right now, the empire craves for a young and competent emperor to bring them peace and stability. Such shaky evidence won’t be enough to stop him from taking the throne. Doing something like bringing Marquis Beclard before the emperor and the nobles to testify will not work.”

“It won’t?”

“Because Marquis Beclard once said he “Acknowledged Prince Latreille as the next emperor”. Which means, he lied before. If the other party retaliate by saying that the testimony of regicide is fake news, it will be hard to rebuke.”

“Ah... Is that so...”

“The Marquis’ testimony won’t become the holy lance that takes down the dragon.”

“So the most it can do is make him feel discomfort?”

“That only applies to Latreille who had become emperor. Because he felt this is the end of this matter, that’s why he denied the rumours here and let me off.”

“No matter what that guy is scheming, I won’t let him lay a finger on Regis.”

Altina said firmly.

For the mistress and her vassal, the responsibilities seemed to be backwards—
Although that was how Regis thought, he couldn’t become Altina’s shield anyway, so

this couldn't be helped.

He scratched the back of his head.

"If you fall, it will be hard to achieve our dream. Please keep that in mind."

"Of course!"



Everyone thought that Latreille's speech was ending... but he was just getting started.

He called out a name.

"Marie Quatre Argentina de Belgaria. Come to me."

This was the loudest chatter the nobles had been today.

She was Latreille's political adversary all this while after all.

However, the Princess was a hero now.

How would he treat her?

The sudden face off pushed the excitement of the aristocrats to the climax.

And of course, Altina wasn't someone who would run away. She grabbed Regis' arm and walked up front.

"Let's go!"

"Wah, wah..."

The nobles parted, as if a sea of gems had been splitted.

They stood right before the podium.

With her hands on her hips, Altina looked straight at Latreille.

“What did you call me out here for?”

“You need to give your well wishes first, Argentina. Our late father also chided you from being too impatient.”

It was interesting ask his political enemy for well wishes—— The nobles looked at them with intrigue.

She just needed to obey, or she would be punished.

Altina had always been basked in such gazes that treated her as a laughingstock.

Hmmp! She shrugged.

“Don’t talk nonsense! Well wishes? There’s no way I will say that. Latreille, your goal isn’t to be the emperor, but something even greater right!? I am not so kind as to congratulate someone who has only travelled halfway towards their goal!”

The atmosphere turned tense.

Regis’ stomach was aching.

After a short silence —— Latreille laughed:

“Ahahaha! Yes, that’s how it should be! As expected of my sister, a good competitor for the throne to the very end. Well said, Argentina. My goal lies far away... I will think of it as words of encouragement.”

“Is that so... Let me make this clear, things aren’t over yet. I haven’t given up! I will pursue my dreams in my own way.”

“A nation without war huh.”

“Yes, a world without war.”

“That’s just a pipedream.”

“It is an empty dream. But if we don’t achieve this goal, humanity will be destroyed.”

Aristocrats wouldn't agree with pacifism, and most of the people present simply smiled wryly. They probably think that this was just a young girl's aspiration.

However, quite a number of intellectuals amongst the nobles showed a serious expression.

The idea that humanity will regress if war continues didn't originate from Regis, but something that had been debated thoroughly in many books. Unfortunately, those with such thinking belonged to a minority...

Latreille did not refute Altina's statement, and returned to the main topic.

"I won't ask you about your ideals. Will you do your best for the sake of the Empire? Even though you have been tasked with the defence of the north and east, you seem to have the forces to spare. Should I hand the other frontlines that are weaker over to you?"

"I don't have forces to spare....!!"

Regis tugged Altina's arm to stop her rebuke.

The Fourth Army was garrisoned in Fort Volks to defend against attacks by the neighbouring Varden Grand Duchy.

However, 4,500 of the soldiers were brought here without any orders from the Ministry of Military Affairs.

Which was bigger than a regiment.

Even though Altina marched her army here because she couldn't accept the news of Regis' death... This could be interpreted as an armed revolt.

If the other party treat this as a revolt, then it wouldn't be a surprise if they chose to suppress them with force.

Regis used the excuse of "The Princess is here to congratulate the coronation of the new emperor, and needed adequate forces to escort her" to avoid this suspicion.

There were still quite a number of High Britannia soldiers left behind in the imperial

territory, so this was a very good reason.

But on the other hand —— it meant that the Fourth Army have that much forces to spare after the ceremony ends.

It would be contradictory to refute that.

Or did the Fourth Army neglected their duty to garrison Fort Volks in order to come here? Or did they lie about not having the manpower to spare?

Latreille said:

“I want the Fourth Army to support the Southern frontline. Even though the Sixth and Eighth Armies are already stationed there, the war is going well.”

“Hmmp... We are going to the south this time?”

Altina looked towards Regis besides her. He nodded in reply.

—— They had to accept. Although this was a far expedition to the south, Regis had request that he hope the other party could accede to.

After hearing Regis' opinion, Altina puffed out her chest.

“You’re always pushing troublesome matters to us... Alright then! I will help you one more time.”

She was saying the right things, but it would be troubling if the conversation ended here.

However, Regis never thought the other party would give a specific orders in such a place, so he couldn't tell Altina anything.

More accurately speaking —— Although he had expected numerous possibilities, it was impossible for him to tell Altina how to respond to each and every scenario.

Regis said to Altina quietly:

“Erm... Well...”

“Hmm?”

“Rank... You understand?”

Regis felt a powerful smack to his back.

“Say it out loud! Loud!”

“Eehhh!?”

“If not for Regis, I would have already lost many times. If I didn’t win in the last war, I wonder what would happen to the Empire... I’m sure everyone here knows that. So say anything that comes to your mind, don’t need to hesitate. No one will call you out.”

Regis groaned.

There were many nobles who saw Regis for the first time, and was surprised since he didn’t fit the impression of a soldier who accomplished so much on the battlefield.

Latreille extended his hand out on the podium.

“I have high expectations of Sir Regis. Do speak your mind. Or do you not wish to use your intellect to serve the Empire that I am ruling?”

“T-That’s not it...”

Regis took a deep breath.



If it was in the past, he probably wouldn’t even be able to breath if he was basked in the gaze of so many nobles.

During the Founding Day Festival in April, Regis omitted the step of ‘stepping up to the podium himself’ from his plan.

And entrusted this step to the First Prince Auguste and the others.

But he couldn't run forever.

"... I'm born and bred in the capital, love the empire deeply, and wish sincerely that more people can live a happy life. Furthermore, I have my own aspirations too."

"Yes, I have never doubted your loyalty."

After seeing Latreille nod, Regis stated his worries out loud.

"... The Sixth and Eighth Army is already at the southern warfront. They're about 40,000 strong, and have cavalries and artilleries, so their forces should be more than sufficient. The empire's enemy to the south is the Hispania Empire and Etruria Theocracy—— They are by no means weak, but shouldn't have the strength to invade Belgaria. If they needed reinforcements under such circumstances, then the issue is probably something that doesn't concern their combat capabilities."

"Fufu. Are you saying that it's meaningless to send reinforcements? What do you think the issue is, Sir Regis? Should we investigate?"

Regis shook his head.

"There is no time to investigate. The Italicia Army has already crossed the river."

"Fufu... I just issued the order to send troops to the southern theatre, and you already investigated so far. As expected of you."

"N-Not really... I'm the Princess' strategist after all."

"You already foresaw that I would send the Fourth Army there?"

"... Well, considering all the possibilities and studying them a little is my job. It's just a coincidence."

Regis hunched his back and lowered his head. These actions that were unlike a soldier made some noble ladies laughed audibly.

However, many of the men had experience commanding an army, and sighed in awe after hearing what Regis said.

"With Fort Volks that holds the northern frontline as the base, the Fourth Army has already despatched forces to the eastern frontlines. Even so, they might receive orders to move to the south." Someone who can consider this possibility and did the researched it in advance couldn't be found amongst their staff officers.

Even someone who was fiercely loyal would normally just wait for orders. Even those who were proactive would be pushed to their limits just trying to predict what their superiors thought.

Compared to the impression of a general who already understood the situation, the incredible thinking of this scrawny youth was even more surprising.

Regis said:

"The Italicia Army has already crossed the Crimea river. From the reports sent to the capital, the enemy numbers about 20,000, and we need to consider possible reinforcements after they cross the river... Even if we send reinforcement now, we don't know how the situation in San Piero, which serve as our southern base is. There isn't time to find out. However, the enemy numbers isn't the reason why the war is going so badly, we can already tell that from the reports."

"....."

Latreille and the nobles listened quietly.

If it was in the past, they would have said: "You're making so many excuses because you don't want to go to the south right!?"

But Regis' reputation had soared after his achievements on numerous battlefields, and his words carried more weight now.

The weight of a speech would change depending on who was the one saying it. Regis hated that, but many nobles believe in authoritarianism, and so do the military.

"The commanders of the Sixth and Eighth Army are both Lieutenant Generals. Their war merits and forces are similar so there isn't too much issues. But if their command hierarchy were combined, there would be confusion amongst the ranks and leads to coordination problems."

"Hmm... The south was garrisoned by the Sixth Army in the past. But due to the threat of the enemy getting stronger, the Eighth Army was transferred there last year. Back then, it has been established that the Sixth Army that is more familiar with the place will take command. The command structure have already been decided right?"

"If the commander of the Eighth Army is as outstanding as Your Majesty, then there wouldn't be any problems."

"Fu... is that flattery?"

"No, what I wish to tell you is that even a Lieutenant General might not act in a way you might expect."

"Ooh?"

Latreille leaned forward.

Germain who was holding the rifle showed an expression of detest, but couldn't interject.

Regis continued:

"The commander has to make difficult decisions on the field. They have to do so before they are certain that is the correct choice—— Is the commander of the Sixth Army trustworthy? Even though he has sufficient forces, the frontlines got pushed back. Hence, it is only natural for the Eighth Army commander to be skeptical of the overall commander's abilities."

"If he don't follow orders, that would be a violation of regulation."

"That's true, but even if he does follows, he would do so timidly to minimize losses. If it come down to this, are they fighting the enemy or fighting the orders...?"

"Are you saying that Imperial soldiers are that weak?"

"Your Majesty lacks experience in this."

"Hah! That's really bold of you, Sir Regis. I have fought in numerous battles, and not just send out orders from the palace!"

“...No, unfortunately... What Your Majesty lacks is ‘a battlefield where the highest ranking commander lacks competency’”

“Hmm.”

“As long as Your Majesty maintain your status, you won’t experience such a battlefield.”

“... I... See.”

Germain cautioned:

“What Sir Regis mentioned makes sense. However, the commanders of the Sixth and Eighth Army are both experienced generals. Aren’t you being too rude here?”

“I read the battle reports they submitted. The Empire has the advantage of terrain and the enemy forces isn’t that large... If one of the commanders is as good as His Majesty, they wouldn’t need to pull back the frontlines and request for aide.”

“Is that really the case? Maybe the enemy commander is really skilled?”

“That might be true in a relative sense... If that is more the reason so to not let the commanders from either army handle the situation.”

“Hmm...”

Latreille stopped their debate.

“I understand. Sir Regis has doubts about the generals commanding in the southern frontlines.”

“... I’m sorry to say so, but that is the case.”

At this moment, a voice could be heard from the nobles saying “How brusque”.

The commander of the 6th army hailed from a grand noble in central after all. There must be someone who was close to him here.

They might be infuriated that the commander’s competency was being questioned,

but since Regis who was highly regarded said so, they couldn't refute strongly and could only grumble about it.

— Well, it's only a matter of time that I will earn the ire of the grand nobles in central.

Regis wasn't bothered at all, but Altina glared at the direction the complaint came from and lectured:

"Isn't it even more brusque to hide and grumble!? Come out here!"

Wahh... Regis stopped her in a hurry.

He felt happy about what she did for him, but things was becoming troublesome.

Latreille said with a wry smile:

"It's hard to speak your mind in the presence of all the other nobles. Sir Regis, let me guess what you want to say—— You want me to appoint Argentina as the overall commander of the southern warfront, correct?"

Regis closed his eyes.

"... It is as Your Majesty says."

Altina raised a hand.

"Whatever, it's fine. If things get easier for Regis, we will be able to win."

"P-Princess..."

Latreille smiled wryly:

"He might be the strategist, but you are the commander right? Sigh, never mind... I just stepped down from the post of Field Marshal, and is just thinking about the matter of reorganizing the military. A general that splits her forces into the northern, southern and eastern front is a little strange..."

This time, Regis panicked more than Germain.

“Your Majesty!? Isn’t it too early...!?”

“It’s fine... I have given it much thought.”

Latreille walked to the front of the podium.

He looked down towards Altina and said:

“A general is someone you entrust command of an army to. And the management of forces above that scale would be the responsibility of the Ministry of Military Affairs, but their performance is honestly lacking. Be it the war that just ended or the situation right now... They failed to manage the various units efficiently. Reform is necessary, but war waits for no one.”

“I understand. And so? Both you and Regis beat around the bush too much.”

“Argentina, it’s you who is too impatient. Listen—— within the Imperial army, only two ranks have the authority to command units on multiple fronts. One of them is Field Marshal, who commands in lieu of the Emperor. I will abolish this rank.”

Since Latreille could take command himself, it was natural for him to abolish the rank of Field Marshal. He didn’t need to delegate out his authority over the entire army.

“And, the other matter is——”

At the point, the nobles turned rowdy.

Regis felt his heart race.

Altina was the only one that was calmly waiting for Latreille to speak.

“What?”

“I hereby appoint you as Généralissime of the Empire. You shall command the imperial defence forces as my right hand man, and obtain more victories for the Empire.”

Woaaahhhh—!? The male nobles who had served in the military before made shock noises.

Even Regis opened his eyes wide in surprise.

— *He actually gave her that much authority!*

Altina tilted her head.

“Eeh? General les is moe?”

It seems that the subject herself who was bestowed a historical rank didn't understand the situation right away.

CHAPTER 3

SOUTHWARDS

Altina got up first and left the banquet.

Regis chased after her.

“Well well... Things are getting messy.”

“Is the situation in the south that bad?”

“Of course it is, the war is going badly over there. That might be problematic... But the bigger problem is your rank of Généralissime. This is a huge matter.”

Altina tilted her head.

“It’s one rank above a full General right? I know that. What’s the problem?”

Regis sighed.

“Lack of greed might be a virtue, but lack of concern is wrong...”

“Hmm...”

She would have refuted him in the past, but Altina had learnt the importance of studying now.

As they walked along the corridor paved with green carpet, Regis said as they walked:

“You might be right, but the Belgarian Empire has not appointed a Généralissime for a long time now. This rank still exists in the system, so it’s natural for you to not understand its significance.”

“So I’m not wrong!”

“Hmm... Even though I think a general should have knowledge about this... But it can’t be helped since we’re busy with the war. I’m partly to blame too.”

“Is that so?”

“... Because I didn’t think you would be bestowed with the Baton of the Généralissime, so I didn’t tell you much about it.”

“Is the Baton of the Généralissime this thing here?”

Altina swung around the command baton that Latreille had given her as proof of her status.

It was made from gold and carved with intrinsic designs, and had gems embedded on it everywhere.

Regis said worriedly:

“It hasn’t been taken out of the treasury for about two hundred years.”

“Hmm?”

“Looking at this from another angle, this is a more valuable piece of art than the famous paintings displayed in the hall just now...”

“Eehhhh!?”

The surprised Altina dropped the Baton of the Généralissime. She then caught it before it hit the ground.

Regis was so shook he thought his heart was going to stop.

“...!?”

“Ahaha... That was close— Really now, don’t scare me Regis.”

“I thought my lifespan had shortened by three years. Don’t play around with a national treasure.”

“This thing is actually valuable enough to affect the national budget...”

— The sword you had been swinging around is much more valuable though. Even so, I should keep quiet about this so it won't affect her swordsmanship in the future.

Did something happen? He thought that Altina seemed to have changed.

She didn't like to splurge in the past too, but was also unconcern with funds expenditure. She seemed to realize the importance of money now.

"...Anyway, aside from the monetary value of the Staff of the Généralissime, the more incredible thing is the authority it grants."

"I can command units on multiple fronts or something like that? Latreille already said that."

She referred to the Emperor's Imperial Edict as 'something like that'...

"... The Généralissime has the authority to raise multiple armies and command them. With virtually unlimited authority over all military matters. The difference from the Field Marshal is the lack of diplomatic powers, so you can't declare war or negotiate for peace."

Généralissime was the highest ranking general officer.

Altina made a face of disbelief.

"... Raise an army?"

"Généralissime can set up an Office of the Généralissime. The Généralissime can then recruit officers, and have the authority to determine the rank, pay and employment of the soldiers under their command. If you wished to, you can change the welfare and rights of your subordinates. And of course, you can post them to any assignments as you wish."

The authority she was given even surprised Altina herself.

"Eh? Eh? Aren't those the jobs of the Ministry of Military Affairs? This is too weird!?"

"His Majesty already mentioned that the Ministry of Military Affairs' performance is lacking... I think he wants to disband the Ministry of Military Affairs."

“But why!?”

“Aren’t you angry about that too? During the last war, High Britannia only had 30,000 men, but Belgaria suffered tremendous losses.”

“Yes.”

“This is because of the difference in preparation between the two sides. It’s only natural for the Ministry of Military Affairs to bear this responsibility. If the one in charge gets replaced but the system remains the same, the situation won’t improve. Emperor Latreille have probably made his decision.”

“W-What decision?”

“For His Majesty and you who has been appointed Généralissime to manage the entire defence force in place of the Ministry of Military Affairs—— That’s probably his plan.”

There were many other reasons why he appointed her as Généralissime, but the biggest problem with the Imperial Army right now was its administrative support.

Regis had no idea if the Ministry of Military Affairs will still exist in name, or if it would be completely disbanded. These matters would depend largely on Minister Beylard.

Altina opened her mouth wide in shock.

“...No... No way!? Even if you tell me this so suddenly, I can’t...!?”

“I really wish you had this reaction before you accepted the Baton of the Généralissime. Well, there’s no choice but to accept it anyway.”

“Ah, that’s right. My status as a Princess is meaningless now, so I can only fight on as a soldier”

“...Yes.”

“In a way, isn’t this great?”

Altina smiled happily.

Regis nodded his head in a vague manner.



They walked out of the palace. As there was a large number of reporters and civilians gathered at the gate, they boarded a carriage.

The celebration in the city was at its rowdiest right now. It would probably last for a week before it ends.

The driver did as he was instructed earlier, avoiding the main roads and took the long way around half the capital before reaching a certain mansion.

The mansion of the Tiraso Laverde House——

As she wasn't on good terms with the other nobles and the First Army, those close with Altina didn't stay in the palace, and lodged here instead.

Heavy Infantry from the Fourth Army guarded the gates as if this was the headquarters on a battlefield. They even erected their unit flags inside the courtyard.

Regis and Altina alighted from their carriage/

The servants lined up to welcome them.

The door in the entrance opened, and an aristocratic lady walk out from the depths of the corridor. It was Fanrine.

“Thank you for your hard work, Princess Argentina, Sir Regis.”

“You too.”

“Thank you. But I only attended the ceremony and skipped the banquet. My grandfather should have attended the banquet.”

“About half of the southern nobles were absent. Probably because they supported me, but I lost in the succession struggle...”

“It can’t be helped, the late Emperor passed away sooner than we expected.”

“Did Latreille made any strange request? Is everything fine?”

“I’m not quite sure about these matters... Leaving that aside for now, congratulations on being appointed as the Généralissime.”

“Ara, you already knew?”

“Of course! There’s a saying in the social world that ‘rumours are spread by the fairies’.”

When the carriage ferrying Regis and the others were still caught in traffic, the nobles who was attending the banquet had probably sent their servants back to relay the news.

As the Tiraso Laverde House was the leader of the southern nobles, they have a strong intelligence network even in the capital.

Fanrine ushered them into the mansion.

“It isn’t as extravagant as the banquet in the palace, but we have also prepared a simple celebration party. If it is not too much trouble we will be honoured if you can relax and dine with us?”

Altina clapped her hands together.

“Alright! I didn’t have any time to spare since morning, I’m famished!”

“Fufu, that’s wonderful.”

“Let’s get changed before heading to the dining hall!”

“Okay.”

The maid Clarisse was waiting behind Fanrine. She took Altina’s luggage.

“... Welcome back, Princess.”

“This is more tiring than sword training. Come help me change.”

Clarissee bowed quietly.

When Clarisse was before others, she would speak plainly without any expression, making it hard to tell how she felt.

This even made the servants here afraid.

She met Regis' gaze, but they didn't speak.

Even though the two of them finally met again yesterday after so long, Regis couldn't find the time to converse with her because he was too busy. She was the princess' maid, while Regis was a strategist. So he couldn't find any reason to look for her and chat.

Fanrine said:

“Well then, come join us Sir Regis.”

“There's a seat for me in the party too?”

“Of course! You're promoted to First Grade Admin Officer right? Compared to combat officers, it's harder for admin officers to advance in grade. I have never heard of such a young First Grade Admin Officer. You're amazing!”

“Ugh...After evaluating the war merits, Emperor Latreille promoted my grade, but is this really fine...?”

“Don't mind such trivial matters. No matter what form it might take, these are well deserved rewards for your job performance. Enough about that, you will catch a cold if you wear those damp clothes. Please get changed.”

“Oh right.”

“I will help too.”

“It's fine it's fine...”

Regis turned down her offer and escaped up the stairs. He was living in a room on the third floor for the time being.

He met Eddie along the way.

“Yo, Regis!”

“Ah, Lord Eddie.”

“What’s that about, Regis? Don’t we have the same status, why are you being so formal?”

“Eh?”

“I’m a First Grade Combat Officer, and you are a First Grade Admin Officer right?”

“That’s true... But I’m a Chevalier, while Lord Eddie is a Duke.”

“Don’t fret the small stuff— We are in the same grade on the battlefield.”

“That’s too sudden.”

“Regis, you can speak with Argentina normally right? I don’t have many friends, and my relation with Latreille is getting distant too.”

They seemed to be good friends in the past, and often practice swords and horse riding together.

But now, Eddie was the bodyguard of Auguste, and a member of Argentina’s faction. It would be hard for them to meet as friends again.

Thinking about it carefully—— The Fourth Army were somewhat distant from the social world. There wasn’t really anyone who could call Eddie who was a Duke and a First Grade Admin Officer a friend.

“... So you came to find me?”

“Felicia said you’re a “good friend” right? Even more the reason for you to be my friend.”

“Saying that the Fifth Princess is my friend is too great an honour...”

“She was really happy when you rekt her in chess. She seemed to like your merciless way of doing things.”

“B-Back then...”

After the Founding Day Festival, he had a lot of work piled up, so he thought about work as he played chess. When he realized it, he had already won after a few moves.

It was great that incident made her happy, but being friends with royals was too heavy a burden for him.

Eddie patted Regis' shoulders cheerfully.

“Let's be good friends too.”

And being friends with a Duke was too much for Regis who was originally a commoner... But turning him down would be too rude.

“... I will work hard.”

“I will be in your care then.”

Eddie changed the topic suddenly.

“By the way, how was the banquet?”

“It was extravagant. Emperor Latreille was planning to sell art pieces in order to raise funds for the military, so it was like an art exhibition.”

“Hahaha... As expected of Latreille. He always says that keeping the art pieces inside the treasury is too much of a waste.”

“It's true that such an opinion is not like a royal... Maybe he got influenced by his cousin?”

Eddie's smile vanished.

“... Beatrice huh. Yes... Regis, you really know everything.”

He sighed.

However, Regis didn’t know the details. He couldn’t even recall the name Beatrice. Did he forgot, or was she not very well known?

He was intrigued, but this was just an idle chatter along the corridor. It was best not to delve too deeply into this.

“Let’s discuss this next time.”

“Yah... That’s right... Best not let them wait too long.”

“Well then, I will go get changed.”

“Right, see you in the dining hall.”

Regis bid Eddie farewell, and returned to his room.



He got changed.

He ended up wearing the Fourth Army uniform he had always worn.

He had already gotten used to it. He had not worn it for a month, and was starting to miss it.

Knock knock, the door was knocked.

“Please come in.”

“Yo Regis, can we bother you for a moment?”

It was the Third Prince Bastian.

Elise was here too.

"Thank you for your hard work in attending the ceremony, Lord Regis. I heard that Princess Argentina has been appointed to the rank of Généralissime, congratulations to the both of you."

This girl who hailed from the Kingdom of High Britannia would sometimes show an air of nobility.

Even though she looked just like an ordinary girl, but her proper demeanour and choice of words made others straighten their posture.

Bastian smiled awkwardly:

"I heard that you are heading south?"

"Yes."

"I see... It's a shame, but I will be staying in the capital. There are things I still need to do, and I need to continue my studies under Professor Bourgine."

"I understand. Your Highness isn't a soldier anyway, so there is no reason for you to head into a warzone."

"Even though I think I should work together with Argentina... But she can't think for herself at all, and will put complete trust in Regis' words whenever she acts."

"I have no intention of inciting her..."

"I know. It's just that my knowledge is too shallow."

"... Please work hard."

"Yeah! For the sake of writing my masterpiece in the future, I have to learn more! Erm—, well—— can I ask you for a favour?"

"What is it?"

"I hope you can... take Elise to the Tiraso Laverde mansion in the south."

"To their mansion of their main house?"

Elise lowered her head.

"Please."

"W-Wait. What's going on? Aren't you two..."

The girl waved her hands around.

"What are you saying, Lord Regis!? Bastian and I, are completely, without even a little, in that sort of intimate relationship!?"

Her cheeks were completely red.

These words were probably too embarrassing, and Bastian lowered his head.

"Y-Yeah..."

Regis tilted his head.

"This is a request from the Third Prince, and escorting important guests is one of the duties of the Imperial army... But why? Why head to the south that's going to become a battlefield?"

Bastian answered in place of the hesitant Elise:

"Sorry, but can you not ask for the reason? Please just understand that I have to get Elise to the house Tiraso Laverde."

"... I see."

"I wanted to go too..."

He clenched his fist.

Elise shook her head.

"You can't... Bastian already did so much for me. But the most important thing to you

right now is studying. If you follow me to the south, you will send me all the way to the other side of the ocean right? I don't want to rob you of the most precious time in your life."

Her words were calm, but her conviction firm.

Bastian bit his lips.

"... I get it. We have talked about this so many times after all."

"Good boy."

The girl looked younger, but she was acting like Bastian's elder sister or mother.

"... I will definitely look for you."

"I will wait for you. There are things that I must do too."

"When the time comes I will let you read my masterpiece."

"Ughh... It's troubling, but I have already braced myself for that."

"It will be interesting! I will definitely write a romantic story that will leave you rolling on the floor laughing!"

Is it really fine for a romance story to make others laugh out loud? Regis thought, but he didn't interrupt their conversation.

He could guess Elise's identity from their conversation. And could imagine why she was choosing to cross the ocean at this time.

Elise looked towards Regis:

"Since I'm seeking your protection, I think I should confess everything..."

"No... your identity as "Ms Elise from High Britannia who came here to study abroad" is more convenient for me."

"Eh?"

“I might have modest talent —— but I’m now the strategist of the Généralissime Office... which is roughly equivalent to the aide of the Minister of Military Affairs.”

“The Généralissime Office is set up by Argentina after all.”

“And so, it would be a grave oversight if I withheld any information from the country. But it couldn’t be helped if I didn’t realize it.”

“Lord Regis...”

“I’m not as good as everyone says after all. There are countless things that I have overlooked.”

Hahaha, Regis laughed.

Elise lowered her head deeply.

“On behalf of the responsibility I carry and myself, I am extremely grateful.”

Bastian reached out his right hand.

“Thank you Regis.”

“I can understand... How it feels to part with someone important. I will definitely send her there safely.”

Regis was worried if this would be lèse-majesté, but he shook the outreached hand to acknowledge the trust that was placed in him.

With tears in his eyes, Bastian’s shoulders started to tremble.

“I-I’m counting on you... Ugh... Ughhh!”

“That hurts!?”

“Oh, sorry! I got careless and used too much strength.”

“I thought my hand was going to be candy crushed...”

Regis shook his right hand that was turning a little red.

Was Bastian too strong, or Regis too weak. Probably both.

Fufu, Elise laughed.

And tears shaped just like a crystal came out from the corner of her eyes.



As they wished to spend their remaining time alone, Bastian and Elise didn't attend the party and left the mansion.

After making public his allegiance to the Argentina faction, he no longer has a place within the palace, and was now staying with his grandfather Marquis Bergerac.

Regis promised to notify them before the army set off.

He left his room and headed for the dining hall.

I was already a little late.

A door along the corridor suddenly opened.

A pale slender hand reached out and grabbed Regis' sleeve.

“Ehh?”

This slender hand pulled Regis into the room with amazing strength.

“Uwah!?”

Regis fell onto the floor, and the door was closed.

—*What happened!?*

It was a very small room.

Like a room for the servant of guests to stay in, or a storage room for luggage.

In order to seal off Regis' movement, that person straddled on top of him.

The person was lighter than he expected.

"Please keep still."

It was a female voice.

After he calmed down, he looked at that person—

It was a slender woman with white skin and light coloured hair.

".....Jessica!?"

"Quiet down."

"W-Why are you doing this?"

She was dressed like an aristocratic lady right now. Her white dress really suit her.

This attire wasn't prominent in this mansion. But maybe her beauty would attract the attention of the men instead....

Regis already explained to the Fourth Army who Jessica was, and already made it clear that she was now an ally. He didn't understand why she was being so forceful about meeting Regis without being seen by others.

Jessica sighed.

"Soldiers from the Fourth Army are patrolling here right?"

"Yes."

"... They know that I'm a mercenary from 《Renard Pendu》 ."

Yesterday, Regis linked up with the Fourth Army that had set up formation near the capital with the help of the mercenaries. They avoided clashing with the First Army

thanks to this.

"I already told them you are an ally thought? I think they already understand and feel grateful for your help."

"Is that so? But is that how they really feel deep down? Think about what happened in the past. Even though 《Renard Pendu》 lost in West Lafressange, we still killed a lot of Imperial soldiers."

"... Yes."

In that battle, Regis created a fog and destroyed High Britannia's supply team.

Even though the Fourth Army won, they suffered heavier than expected casualties.

He still remembered clearly the time when their headquarters were attacked.

Jessica glanced towards the corridor.

Heavy footsteps passed by outside.

"... I... don't trust others like you do. There is a chance they might kill me for revenge if I let my guard down for a moment."

"The guards here are all veteran regulars. They are all rational soldiers."

"There are heaps of mercenaries who got hung bearing such naive thoughts. Mercenary did things like waving white flags or faking injuries to catch them off guard. Since we will scheme against others, we will be wary of others plotting against us too."

"I see."

"For example, what will happen if I put my knife right on your neck? If I threaten the Princess and ask her to exchange my brother for her strategist, wouldn't things be much simpler?"

"... Maybe Gilbert will be freed. But what will happen after that? I already told you — you will be chased by the Belgarian Empire, while your reputation amongst the neighbouring nations would remain poor. Wouldn't that be a tough way to rebuild?

You already know that."

"That's correct. That's why I agreed to a cooperative relationship on the personal level."

"Wonderful, since you still remember that, you can get off me now. That will make me happy."

She wasn't heavy, but it was hard for him to calm down.

He could feel Jessica's body warmth seeping into him.

Even if he ignored that aspect, having a woman forcefully pressed him down was tugging at his psychological scar, and he was sweating cold bullets right now.

"... You should be the one that needs to remember. Heading to the south? What's with that? My brother is in Fort Volks!?"

Anxiety leaked from Jessica's voice.

It was a rare sight since she seldom show her feelings.

Hmm, Regis thought about it.

"There are 700 people left in 《Renard Pendu》 . You can't rescue Gilbert from Fort Volks with this numbers. So you wanted to use me as a hostage in the beginning. But after considering it, you decided it was better to help me instead right?"

"Sigh... But that's only under the condition that my brother will be saved."

"Aren't you too anxious?"

"You won't understand. The members psyche are already at their limits. They are only bearing with it in the hope that my brother will be rescued... But they are guys who can't conceal their feelings that well. Surrounded by imperial forces and living in tents on the outskirts of the capital, they are as tense as men with ropes tied to their necks, walking along the cliff."

"... It's that bad?"

"We don't trust the imperials. We are always on guard against being backstabbed out of the blue."

Jessica took out a small blade from seemingly out of nowhere. That looked just like a normal dress, just where was she hiding that?

She pressed that blade onto Regis' neck.

"Answer me Regis d'Auric... Did you lie to me?"

"Not at all."

"But you want to go to the south?"

"... I didn't expect you to press me so hard. I will answer your expectations, let's have a good talk."

"A spoken agreement again?"

"The situation is changing too fast, and times are changing."

"I have been waiting all this time, while you have been working so actively in the dark within the capital, Lord Regis. Franziska even got injured, but I have yet to see a dime from you. Just how long do you expect us to follow you?"

"...When you put it this way, it makes sense for you to get angry. I'm in the wrong."

When Latreille attempted to assassinate Regis, Regis only escaped the search and returned to the capital with their help.

Food, water, sleeping bag and the guards were all prepared by them, and they even went to the Fourth Army despite the risk of war breaking out.

Imperial soldiers would be given remuneration, and when things stabilized, they would be rewarded according to their contributions and maybe receive a promotion.

However, mercenaries work for the sake of remunerations. Normally, they would receive half the money in advance as a deposit.

Regis said troublingly:

"... I understand, but it's hard for me to give you a satisfactory payment right now. After all, the Fourth Army don't have enough funds. Although there is a budget set aside for the Généralissime Office, the soonest we can get it will be next month."

"Are you saying we should wait?"

"... I can only ask you to believe me, but I'm not just idling around either. I also asked you to go to the south with us."

"And the reason?"

The blade on his neck felt really cold.

Jessica leaned closer.

She was a beautiful woman. It was hard to tell what she was thinking, but Regis could feel that her emotions were really volatile.

"... It will be great if you tell me that earlier... I already discussed it with the Princess. To return the favour for you helping me, she agreed to release Gilbert."

She opened her eyes wide.

"I-Is that true?"

"... I don't know how many times I have said this... But please believe me."

He didn't have any written proof.

Jessica looked unhappy.

"Why didn't you leave written records for something so important? Or is my brother not important to you?"

"When you discuss future plans with the Mercenary King... Do you always record them down?"

“... There’s no need for that.”

“It’s the same for us.”

Jessica moved the knife away.

She finally got off Regis.

Regis wiped away his cold sweat as he stood. He touched his own neck.

“I thought it really cut me.”

“... This is a fake.”

“Eh!?”

Jessica stabbed her own hand with the knife.

She didn’t bleed at all.

“I’m not good at handling knives. If I cut you accidentally, things will become messy.”

“... Were your unstable emotions also an act?”

“Think what you want.”

Jessica reverted to her usual cold expression.

Regis sighed.

“I already posted a letter to Gilbert. We will release him as promised, but what he’ll do next is up to him. I don’t know if he will come and link up with us.”

“... Indeed.”

“Personally, I still look forward to borrowing your power. That’s why I added the request to go south.”

He didn't know if they would agree to joining them, so this was a request and not an order.

Gilbert would want the chance to restore his reputation after losing the last battle. Hence, the southern frontlines would suit him just fine.

Jessica tidied her dress.

And seemed to have believed him.

"If the arrangement with my brother is true, then thank you... But don't forget about your promise with me okay?"

She promised to help on the personal level in order to exchange for future supplies for 《Renard Pendu》 .

"We will keep our promise of course. That's right, want to come to our party?"

"Lord Auric... It's impossible for the nobles to invite mercenaries like us to dine with them."

"Is that so?"

"I won't be happy even if I'm invited, so I will turn you down."

"I won't force you."

Jessica pointed to the door as if she wanted him to hurry up and leave.

"... More importantly, if I go to the dining hall with you, it won't be worth it if I rouse the jealousy of Princess Argentina."



He only left to change clothes, but he took a long time to reach the dining hall.

He entered the dining hall.

In the middle of the wide and extravagant hall was a beige coloured long table. Art

pieces adorned the wall, and the servants were lined up there too.

Altina was sat at the farthest end of the table.

He thought they would have started already, but it seemed that the food had not been served yet. There were just bread and glasses on the table.

Altina said:

“You’re finally here, Regis!”

“E-Erm... Have you all been waiting for me?”

“Naturally. This party is held in honour of you and me after all.”

“No no no... Letting the Princess who is both a royal and the Généralissime wait for someone like me is not natural at all.”

“Enough about that, come sit down.”

She waved at him, and Regis sat to her right.

Regis had been using honorifics because a stranger was present too.

Eric stood behind Altina. He had accepted Regis’ proposal and became an escort rifleman. He didn’t hold a rifle as it was indoors, and wore a sword on his waist instead.

He nodded to greet Regis with a smile.

To Regis’ right was the mistress of this mansion, Fanrine.

“Will champagne be fine, Sir Regis?”

“Yes, thank you.”

She gestured, and the server poured a golden translucent liquid into the glass. It was bubbly.

To Altina’s left was Eddie, who wasn’t wearing a sword because there were guards in

the mansion.

Beside him was the knight commander Abidal Evra. He was dressed for battle, ready for action at a moment's notice. To him, the capital was the enemy's territory.

Directly opposite Altina, on the other long end of the table, a man in his early thirties was seated there.

He was a gentleman dressed elegantly in the style of a noble. His reddish brown hair was combed back, while his brows and beard was as neat as a painting.

After meeting Regis' gaze, he greeted politely:

"Lord Regis, congratulations on your promotion to First Grade Admin Officer."

"Thank you."

"Nice to meet you, I'm Count Gauchen. I serve as a bureau manager under Military Affairs Minister Beylard"

He is my supervisor—— Fanrine added. She was a General Affairs Officer within the same Ministry.

A Bureau Manager was a position that could issue orders to many people under the ministry.

He was already attained the peerage of Count in his early thirties, a great accomplishment at such a young age. Maybe he was related to the grand nobles, and gave the feeling of being an elite.

—— *Did Ms Fanrine invite him? For what purpose?*

As Regis thought about that, the maids served up the dishes.

Altina raised her glass.

"Cheers!"

The host Fanrine responded:

“Congratulations to Princess Argentina’s appointment as Généralissime, and to Sir Regis’ promotion.”

The sound of glasses clinking overlapped.

Regis raised his glass, and then brung it to his lips.

It was sweet and fragrant, and the bubbles burst on his tongue. As if the champagne was playing lively and energetic music.

“Ahh... This is good wine.”

“This is the pride of the main House. Only 30 of this champagne are bottled each year.”

“This is really valuable then.”

House Tiraso Laverde also operate a winery, and the wine they produced was very reputable.

Regis turned his eyes to Gauchen.

He had finished his glass too.

“Wonderful grape wine. The taste is exquisite, but more importantly, the transparency is excellent. I wish organizations would be just like it.”

“... It’s not transparent right now?”

He nodded in response to Regis’ question:

“I strong armed my way to attend this party. I wish to have a good discussion with the Princess Généralissime and her staff with regards to setting up the Généralissime Office.”

Altina waved her hand.

“I leave all this difficult stuff to Regis.”

“Wait... Your Highness...”

“I learned all sorts of things, but the more I learned, the more I feel that Regis is amazing. I will listen carefully, but I will leave the negotiations to him.”

“... Hah.”

The dishes were served, and Eddie was the first one to stick his fork out.

“I will leave the talking to you, and take care of the meat!”

“I want to eat too!”

They couldn’t finish the food anyway, so there was no need to fight.

Regis sighed softly. But the other party didn’t seem to mind at all.

“.....Count Gauchen, what will happen to the Ministry of Military Affairs now? Do you know what Prince Latreille intends to do?”

“The rumours that he wants to dissolve the organization had leaked long ago. Before the passing of the late Emperor.”

“That early!?”

“It is gradually lagging behind other nations in both intelligence reports and logistics support, His Majesty Latreille—— Who was the Field Marshal back then had already thought it through carefully.”

“...And his worries turned true in the war with High Britannia.”

“He finally made his decision after seeing the huge losses incurred by the Empire.”

“But he is actually dissolving it? I thought he would at least leave the name...”

“Probably because Minister Beylard had been transferred to the Ministry of Ceremony.”

“Hmm... This means that he will let Minister Bergerac retire?”

“He is getting in on age after all.”

Retiring after presiding over the Emperor’s coronation was a great honour for past Ministers of Ceremony.

Being the grandfather of Bastian who was in the Argentina faction might have influenced this decision too.

Hence, Gauchen didn’t state it explicitly.

“And the others?”

“Most will lose their jobs.”

“Ehh? Can they accept that?”

Gauchen laughed disdainfully:

“Even Minister Beclard himself couldn’t accept it. Compared to the Ministry of Military Affairs, the authority of the Ministry of Ceremony is too limited. And His Majesty Latreille also expressed his clear intention to cut down on the scale of pompous parades.”

“So this is actually a demotion.”

“Yes. Other high ranking officials... feels the same of course.”

“They couldn’t accept losing their jobs?”

“They feel that they had been doing the same work as their predecessors, so why are they the only ones who ended up like this? They are furious.”

“They don’t think they did anything wrong?”

“Yes.”

“Hmm—— After all, the Ministry had not made such a big gulf for the past decades.”

“Normal people will think that things that had gone on for a century will continue for another century.”

“But that isn’t applicable now.”

“Because of new technology flowing in from the east, new materials could be made and new machines were invented. Both the military and manufacturing industry will be revolutionized. I think we are at a turning point in history.”

“I feel the same.”

“Lord Auric, what do you think the coming era will be like?”

“... His Majesty Latreille will widen the frontlines. At the very least, he will counterattack High Britannia and Langobalt that invaded us within this year. It will be the same for the south.”

“We will be attacking huh...”

“After the Imperial Army succeeds in mass producing the new rifles and cannons, the way wars are waged will change drastically. If rifles can fire continuously, then a small number of infantry will be able to defeat cavalry.”

When the Knight Commander Abidal Evra heard what Regis said, he showed a troubled face.

This will happen in the future, so there is still time to do something about it—— Regis added.

Gauchen tilted his head.

“Will the Belgarian Empire walk down the path of a conqueror?”

“It will be inevitable for a time.”

“... And after that?”

Regis looked him in the eye.

Where should he begin?

Was he someone trustworthy? Since Fanrine invited him, he was probably not from Latreille's faction...

Altina said as she chewed on her meat.

"If I thought he could succeed, I wouldn't have competed with him for the throne!"

She spoke her mind.

Regis said with a sigh.

"Well... That's how it is. The future I want to see is slightly different from the ideals of the Emperor."

He still couldn't utter the words "The Imperial Army will lose".

Gauchen nodded.

"As expected, Lord Auric is different from the other soldiers."

"I know that much. After all, I can't use a sword or ride a horse..."

"That's not what I mean... Anyway, I respect your careful and thorough thinking very much."

"Is that so?"

He didn't answer, and changed the topic instead.

"... I might be from a Count house, but I am just a poor noble from the boondocks, and have no status within the Ministry. After being forced to handle with many troublesome tasks, I learned a lot."

Fanrine nodded.

It was very rude for an aristocratic lady to interject when the men were discussing politics.

But it was clear from her face that she acknowledge Gauchen's capabilities.

The dissolution of the Ministry of Military Affairs.

Minister Beylard's transfer to the Ministry of Ceremony.

Most of the employees got retrenched.

And his view on how things would develop in the future...

Regis finally realized Fanrine's true intention out of countless possibilities.

"Hmm... The Généralissime Office would need to take over the work of the Ministry of Military Affairs. Right now, the Fourth Army is extremely lacking in manpower to deal with the administrative work."

"I know about that."

"Regarding these issues, do you have a way to solve them, Count Gauchen?"

"Yes, I will do what I can."

In order to help the shorthanded Fourth Army, Fanrine introduced us to the dissolved Military Affairs Ministry.

That might be so, but this was still an organization that had been dissolved by Latreille because of its serious flaws. So not all its employees were beneficial to it.

There was a need to scrutinize them.

And Regis needed to see clearly if Gauchen had the capability. Was he someone who could be entrusted with work and be of help to Altina?

Regis then asked—



“To His Majesty Latreille, Princess Argentina and the Fourth Army is a double edged sword. They are a necessary force for him to push his hegemonism agenda. But our difference in ideologies meant he couldn’t completely dismiss the possibility that we will rebel against him.”

And of course, we have no intention of doing so now—— Regis concluded.

Altina added:

“I just want to end all wars in this world, not defeat Latreille or start a civil war.”

“...That might be so, but he will definitely see us as famished hunting dogs. A civil war almost erupted a few days ago after all.”

“It’s his fault for sending that rubbish report!”

“That’s a bit far-fetched.”

In the end, in the last letter Latreille sent in his capacity as a Field Marshal, he apologized for the mistake. Since he became the Emperor, all that was now moot.

Regis continued:

“His Majesty Latreille should be trying his best to weaken the Fourth Army. After all, he attempted to assassinate its strategist.”

“... So it’s true.”

Gauchen wasn’t surprised at all.

“You already knew?”

“There are rumours. Even though we won the siege battle, the assistant chief strategist in headquarters was killed in action... Anyone with a little knowledge about the military will suspect foul play.”

“Well, that’s how it is.”

"Lord Auric is a hero who saved our country. I'm glad that you survived."

"... Thank you. Well, our introductions is getting too long, I would like to ask Lord Gauchen about something."

"How may I be of service?"

He straightened his back.

Altina and Eddie also looked his way.

"...Right now, His Majesty Latreille didn't weaken the prowess of the Fourth Army, he even bestowed a historical high level of authority to the Princess. What do you think made him change his mind?"

Gauchen put his hand on his chin.

"Ughh... Reasons huh..."

Regis turned his gaze to Abidal Evra and Eddie.

"I would like to pose this question to everyone here too."

Abidal Evra raised his hand first.

"I think it's because he concluded that Sir strategist is a dangerous opponent, and decided to prevent any revolt by improving your treatment."

"Appeasement huh. As a ruler, improving remuneration to raise the loyalty of one's subjects is an adequate strategy. But raising the white flag for just one of his subject and diverting from his path of a conqueror seems unlikely. His Majesty is a great person with an unyielding spirit."

"Oh... I see. It's hard to imagine him trying to get on the Princess' good side."

Next was Eddie.

"I think he was forced by the circumstances? He left the north, south and east fronts

to the Fourth Army, while he only defends the capital. And you said he plans to attack High Britannia or Langobalt right? If the Military Affairs Ministry can't be counted on, he will have to concede that the Généralissime Office is needed."

"... Because his plan to weaken us failed, so he changed his strategy and decided to use us as pawns instead. Since he will be using us, a more powerful pawn will be better right?"

"That's right."

"Not a bad idea. But he can't dismiss the possibility that the Fourth Army will turn around and attack the capital in rebellion instead. How should he deal with that then?"

"Hmm..... Well, then he can just cut down those who rebel."

"Then he need to be ready for a civil war. That's a bit of a stretch, but I think it's really close."

Altina stood up.

"I won't start a civil war! I absolutely won't start one!"

"... Of course. I'm just trying to analyze what His Majesty Latreille is thinking."

"He is always toying with me. Every time! No matter how many troops he gives me, he still think I can't win!"

"No no..."

He did acknowledge our capabilities, Regis thought.

Or rather, he wouldn't have allocated precious forces and budget to them if not for that.

The Généralissime could command almost half of all imperial forces. If they lose, the nation could be in danger of being destroyed.

Fanrine didn't answer.

Finally, Gauchen raised his hand.

"On top of the southern front, the Princess also needs to support the northern and eastern fronts, so it's an undeniable fact that she needed the appointment of Généralissime. Even if she is promoted to Full General, the sixth and eighth army won't yield to her orders."

"I think so too."

In the past, when she was in Fort Sierck——

The newly appointed Major General Altina took over the role of commander from the Black Knight, Brigadier General Jerome.

Even though she outranked him in the Ministry's orders, her peerage and military rank...

The soldiers wouldn't obey her command.

The same thing would happen if the Fourth Army heads to the south. There wasn't time for a duel this time.

Altina clenched her fists when she heard what Regis said.

She was still smiling, but she had an aura of intense rage.

"Hmmp... so the people in the Ministry already knew that Jerome wouldn't listen to my orders... Can I punch him?"

Gauchen leaned back.

"T-The personnel assignment back then has nothing to do with me."

Regis consoled him:

"There are all sorts of work in the Ministry too... But it's different for the Généralissime Office. If they refused orders, we can dismiss the commanders of the Sixth and Eighth Army."

“We can do that!?”

Altina stared with her eyes wide.

Regis affirmed that:

“Since the Ministry of Military Affairs can do it, we can do so too.”

“But if we dismiss the commander, than the noble army which makes up the core will be gone too.”

Altina nodded after hearing Gauchen additional comments.

“That’s true. Ah, the Beilschmidt border regiment is Jerome’s noble army.”

“If we dismiss them, then we won’t have anyone left.”

Regis shrugged.

The sixth and eighth army might not be the noble’s army, and there are other troops they could count on, but it will be better to not dismiss the commander recklessly to keep the forces as intact as possible.

“Hmmp—— instead of a duel, dismissing them will be far easier.”

“That’s right.”

Gauchen got back to the topic:

“I think the idea that His Majesty Latreille was forced by circumstances to hand the Staff of the Généralissime to the Princess is correct.”

Alright! Eddie struck a victory pose.

However—— Regis continued the conversation:

“How would he quell any rebellion then?”

Gauchen said calmly:

“His Majesty is starting to mass produce the new rifles. After the southern front is stable, he should be ready to start issuing out large quantities of rifles.”

The First Army reputed to be the mightiest in the Empire would be armed with the new rifles.

Abidal Evra groaned:

“I don’t want to fight them...”

Regis felt the same.

“That’s true. I think that His Majesty Latreille only gave out the Staff of Généralissime out so generously because we are at a turning point of the war.”

Altina tilted her head.

“My units will need to equip rifles too?”

“Of course, His Majesty wants to equip the entire army with the new rifles and cannons. If we don’t do so, we won’t be able to have an overwhelming advantage over the neighbouring countries.”

“Ehh?”

It was natural that she didn’t understand.

“I know why you’re confused, Your Highness. If we revolt after getting the rifles, our disadvantage in weapons would be negated right?”

“Yes! I won’t do that though, but will he really trust me?”

“Hahaha... That’s impossible.”

Regis laughed out loud.

Altina pouted.

“Muuu——”

“.....!?”

Gauchen was shocked when Regis laughed and brushed aside what the Princess cum Généralissime just said.

Ahh... Regis covered his mouth.

“Well... There is one big difference between rifles and the weapons used so far.”

After thinking about it for a while, Altina leaned forward:

“Ah, it’s supplies!”

“Correct! Amazing, you have improved a lot!”

“Fufufu, praise me more, Regis.”

Eddie crossed his arms and tilted his head:

“Hmm? Supplies?”

“Rifles need ammunition in order to fight. And His Majesty Latreille wants to have sole control over the production of ammunition.”

“Ohh... I see. I get it, so that’s how it is——”

Eddie nodded.

He felt a bit uneasy, but decided to proceed with the topic.

“His Majesty Latreille is preventing any uprising by using the fact that ‘it is impossible to start a war if one can’t obtain guns and ammunition’. And he has even gone one step further.”

After this would be —— the dissolution of noble armies and nationalizing the armed forces.

Regis shrugged.

"As for the Staff of the Généralissime, he will be taking it back later, so he generously handed it to you for now."

That's how he actually thinks!? Altina puffed out her cheeks.

Gauchen sighed and said:

"... No one in the Ministry or the aristocrats understand the situation to such an extent. As expected of you."

"Lord Gauchen already realized this too. Have you told the other nobles about this?"

"Fufu... Nobles are arrogant creatures. They have no doubts that the world exist for their sakes. They believe like an innocent child that the new Emperor won't strip them of their privileges. Even if I warn them about this, they will just mock me for thinking too much. Their reasoning will be—— since it has gone on for a century, it will continue for another century."

"That make sense."

"How laughable."

"... The dissolution of the Ministry of Military Affairs is probably his preparation for something else."

The top man for the Ministry was a Minister, and also a grand noble. Latreille's true intention is to keep the rifles and ammunition out of the hands of the grand nobles.

Regis pondered—— Gauchen's understanding of the current situation wasn't too different from him. His abilities were unquestionable.

"...Well then, last question."

"What is it?"

"Regarding the rumours about His Majesty Latreille, can you tell me what you think about it, Lord Gauchen?"

He held his breath.

Regis was referring to the suspicion of regicide.

The Princess before him might be Latreille's former political enemy, but she was still the Emperor's sister. If he didn't answer carefully, he might be branded a traitor or transgress lese majeste.

Regis stared at Gauchen expressionlessly.

Gauchen crook his mouth.

"... I didn't attend the palace's banquet and showed up at this party instead. That's my answer, what do you think?"

Regis looked at Altina.

"Your Highness, I strongly recommend appointing Lord Gauchen as an Admin Officer of the Généralissime Office. Not just him, but also the people he recommends too."

"Really? Since Regis says so, I will be in your care then, Lord Gauchen!"

Altina looked at him with a smile.

He stood up and bowed formally.

"Thank you for accepting me! I will do what I can to share Your Highness' burdens!"

Ara, Altina added.

"There are actually people who are willing to join our unit that don't even have any rest days, this is great—"

"... By the way, I forgot to mention the work conditions. Lord Gauchen, I have never taken a day off ever since I was assigned to this unit. Will you be fine with that?"

"Eh!?"

CHAPTER 4

HEADING TO THE SOUTH

One week later—

Imperial Year 851, August 20th.

The Fourth Army led by Généralissime Marie Quatre Argentina de Belgaria set off from the Imperial Capital Versailles.

They were about 8,000 strong.

On top of the 500 cavalry and 4,000 infantry from Fort Volks, they were joined by 2,000 mercenaries and 1,500 regular soldiers hailing from the south.

The long lines of soldiers marched along the road.

Regis was seated inside a white carriage.

“... It has been a while.”

“Indeed.”

Claris was seated opposite him.

There were just the two of them at this time.

Altina was at the head of the formation, riding on her Karakara. Eddie and Eric was beside her as guards.

Abidal Evra led the cavalry that was to the front of the formation.

At the very back was the mercenary group 《Renard Pendu》 . A contract had not been formalized with them yet.

They were merely tagging along because they believed Regis when he said the Mercenary King Gilbert will come to the south.

A week wasn't enough to post a letter to Fort Volks and receive a reply. Even Regis wasn't sure how Gilbert would reply, whether if he would accept.

The acting band leader Jessica and her 10 years old sister Martina travelled together.

Franziska still haven't recovered because of dystrophia, and had to stay in the capital. Bastian was taking care of her.

Behind them—

Elise rode on another carriage.

On the battlefield, the guest had to stay in the rear while the strategist remained in the center—— that was the official reason he gave.

Regis who realized Elise's true identity was worried about others finding out who she was, and didn't want her to know unnecessary information, so he quarantined her off.

Clarisse looked in the direction of the capital.

"She is very reluctant to see you go."

"Hmm? Ahh, you mean Ms Fanrine. A lot has happened after all..."

Because she was traveling with Regis, she met in life threatening danger. Marked by assassins, soldiers bared their blades at them, and they travelled for several days in the treacherous hills.

Why didn't Fanrine hate Regis?

Wasn't that the biggest mystery?

How unfathomable.

Clarisse narrowed her eyes.

"Yes, a lot of things."

“Yes.”

“Including crossdressing?”

“Ughh... I will be happy if you can forget about that.”

“If you want to erase my memory, than you will have to cover it up with even stronger ones, Sir Regis.”

“What do you want me to do, Ms Clarisse?”

“How about dressing up like a maid?”

“I’m not interested in crossdressing.”

“I’m just kidding.”

“I won’t wear skirts either.”

She probably guessed that Regis would answer this way, so Clarisse turned her gaze back to the window.

“... It’s a pity, I already made the preparation.”

“You’ve already made preparation!?”

He finally noticed that on the roof of the white carriage where Altina’s personal belongings were stored, there was something else stashed there.

“A-Anyway... It’s great that Ms Fanrine joined the Généralissime Office. She is capable and has a wide social network.”

The Généralissime Office staff stayed in the capital for the mean time. After all, be it personnel, supplies or intel, all these would be centered around the capital.

The building within the palace where the Ministry of Military Affairs was using had been occupied by admin officers from Latreille’s First Army.

The Généralissime Office suddenly lost its base of operations... Right after this issue

popped up, Gauchen found a mansion owned by a noble whose House was on the decline.

The Fourth Army's administrative that would turn into chaos without Regis could finally operate normally.

They have hired about 150 ex-officers from the old Military Affairs Ministry. Most of them were commoners or nobles who weren't the first born, and all of them were young.

As the Ministry of Military Affairs had more than 2,000 staff, this number seemed really low. But since Gauchen said that this would be enough, he would leave it to him for now.

Regis also needed to learn how to utilize his subordinates.

He was a First Grade Admin Officer in the Imperial Empire, but he didn't have any direct subordinates. Only retired officers and Regis was like this.

Clarisse returned her gaze back to Regis.

"By the way... have you sent a letter to your family?"

"It should be fine right? Speaking of which, have my brother-in-law Enzo went home yet?"

"No, he's still in Fort Volks... At least he was when we set off."

"Is that really fine? He had already left home for such a long time."

"What about you, Sir Regis?"

Why is she asking again, is there any meaning behind this—— Regis thought.

After he splitted up with Altina, the notification that was sent to his sister was...

"Ah, was my killed in action notification sent to my sister!?"

Clarisse nodded.

Regis hugged his head. Did they sent her the body and personal effects too!? But they belonged to someone else!

“Oh no... I never thought about putting the affairs of my death in order. No, did anyone send her the notice that this is a mistake?”

“I wonder...?”

“Well, the ones who send out bereavement notification... is the Ministry of Military Affairs, which has been dissolved!?”

What about the pending jobs? The logistical supplies, promotions and assignment had been taken over by the First Army and the Généralissime Office.

What about the cancelation of the bereavement notification!?

Regis broke out in cold sweat.

“I-I will be lectured! I can’t do anything about the mistake, but I didn’t contact her for over a week even though I was fine! P-Paper... Pen...”

“Over here, Sir Regis. Please calm down.”

“Y-Y-Yes.”

“There’s a saying in this world, ‘too little too late’.”

“That’s not a consolation at all!”

Regis imagined how he would be lectured the next time he meets his sister as he wrote swiftly inside the wobbling carriage.

Clarisse looked at him with a gentle smile.

“.....”

“W-What is it?”

“I’m really glad that Sir Regis returned safe and sound.”

“The person you love to tease is back, so you won’t feel bored anymore right?”

“Ara... Even I will have times when I feel plainly happy. After all, the person I like a lot has returned safely.”

“You are saying such things again...”

Regis sighed.

This must be another trap. Regis adopted a defensive pose, but she was all smiles as she looked his way. In the end they were just looking at each other.

“Fufufu... What’s the matter, Sir Regis? If you want to have something sweet, I have some sugary snacks here.”

“Ah, no... Where’s the follow up?”

“It’s nothing. I’m just overjoyed that Sir Regis who I liked so much has returned safely.”

“Eh...”

“Does Sir Regis think it is a waste to be a little happy about meeting me again?”

“No no, that makes me happy too.”

“Well, I’m very glad to hear that.”

Even after waiting for a while, she didn’t follow up with any teasing words.

Clarisse’s cheek was dyed with a shade of red.

Regis’ face was heating up.

He felt bashful and returned his gaze to the letter. His hands were trembling, but that had nothing to do with the carriage shaking.

“Wait... Ms Clarisse... This is embarrassing.”

"No. I was really worried about you, Sir Regis. I really like you."

"Uwahh."

He couldn't write any further. Regis felt that his brain was a mess.



On the 3rd day of their journey to the south——

Noon.

There was a scout report.

A merchant with a caravan that came from the south wishes to meet with the army.

Regis crossed his arms.

"Hmm... We don't have the time for trade negotiations... But since they came from the south, maybe we can gleam some intel about the war from them. Alright, we will meet them. Please tell the Princess that we will take a break for 30 minutes."

"Understood!"

The messenger saluted.

After that, the merchant sent a message that they wish to visit the headquarters.

It seems like the other party just wanted to meet with Regis.

Even if it was a business negotiation, Altina will just tell Regis "I will leave it to you", and she was already tired from the march.

After a short wait, a lady walked forth from the midst of the troops.

Her hair that was as black as ink was draped over her black dress. Regis thought it would be a man since the visitor was a merchant, and didn't expect such a young lady.

A young girl in a white dress followed behind her. She had a laced parasol in her hands to keep the bright sun from harming the lady's skin. Since she wasn't dressed like a maid, then that young girl was probably a servant.

The thing about her that was most unlike a merchant was her lack of any luggage.

The impression she gave was of an aristocratic lady out on a stroll. Why did the scouts report say that she was a merchant from a caravan?

She pulled aside the veil before her face, and her eyes as dark as obsidian looked Regis' way.

"Seems like you're still alive, Regis?"



It was an alluring voice, but the tone was just like a man.

Regis gulped.

“Ehh!? Ms Eleanor!?”

The visitor was Eleanor Ailred Winn de Tiraso Laverde. The daughter of a Duke house, she was a capable lady with the known as 《La Renarde du Sud》 .

Regis was just wondering why he didn't see her at the banquet some days ago, and now they meet here.

Eleanor said with a trembling voice:

“... Regis, it's been a while, but what I'm about to say pains me a lot.”

“What's the matter?”

“Please help us.”

A sudden squall that was louder than the wind blew by, sweeping the parasol in the young girl's hands into the sky.

SIDE STORY

THE BLACK KNIGHT AND THE ABANDONED FORT,

PART 1

Jerome Jean de Beilschmidt had black hair and eyes, rode on a dark horse with dark armour and had never lost a battle before.

He obtained the title of 《Black Knight》 because of his appearance and capabilities, his name was enough to strike fear into both friend and foe.

Imperial year 851 July 1st——

A detachment from the fourth army and the seventh army formed a mixed unit, and was despatched to the eastern front.

They numbered 13,000 in total.

The number was a bit low for the main forces holding up the eastern front, but it was a huge number for one army.

Specifically speaking, Coignieres (Brigadier General) commands 8,000 men of the Seventh Army.

Benjamin (Lieutenant General) leads 4,500 remnants of the Second Army.

Jerome (Major General) had 500 black knights cavalry under him.

They advanced along the main road within the forest.

The sun was setting in the west.

At the head of the long marching line were——

Jerome on his black horse and a newly appointed knight captain besides him.

“... Life is sure full of twists and turns.”

The knight mumbling to himself was Holger Orjes.

Jerome sneered:

“Hmmp... you want to complain about something?”

“No no, I’m just thinking aloud. To think that I will one day ride alongside the heroic black knight of Belgaria and have my own subordinates.”

“I see.”

“Half a year ago, I was just a mercenary in Varden Grand Duchy, and got assigned to Fort Volks.”

Before the Beilschmidt Border Regiment seized Fort Volks, Regis captured Holger in order to obtain intelligence.

After they seized the fort——

Holger was amongst those who wishing to switch allegiance to the Belgarian Empire. He did so partly out of fear that he would be hung as a mercenary if he didn’t submit...

“I will use anything that is of use, even trash.”

They didn’t question his origins at all.

“Haha... This is because some of the old guards have left the unit. I know that we are short handed right now.”

The knight Kruger died, and Abidal Evra had been assigned to be the Princess’ escort. They also lost some other capable men.

“Even if we can make up the numbers, they are still trash.”

Jerome spat these words out.

Holger shrugged.

“When I got surrounded by the barbarians near Fort Volks, I have resigned myself to being skinned alive...”

“You fell into Regis’ trap right?”

“I was tricked... I regret it a lot in the past, but I don’t feel that way now.”

“Hmm?”

“After all, I saw for myself the battle between the Imperial First Army and High Britannia. Thank god I’m blessed with good luck. Who would have guess they would be burned alive in a swamp doused with oil, getting blown up by a ship of explosives, or getting charged by cavalry while blinded by thick fog.”

There were countless enemy soldiers who lost their lives to Regis’ schemes.

“I’m very unhappy about that. Thrusting your lance through a powerful foe is a real battle. Using schemes like Regis would be just like a con artist.”

“Haha... No matter what, I had a hard life. I’m a knight from a fallen nation after all.”

Holger was born to a knight house, but he lost his home nation to a civil war in the Germanian Federation, and ended up as a mercenary.

He received training on leading troops in the past, so he had the ability to command men.

And his turbulent experience as a mercenary made him more experienced than a regular from the imperial army, which also made him more cool headed and calm during emergencies.

Jerome couldn’t bring himself to compliment others...

But he knew the importance of talented men. Holger’s hard life could be considered a blessing to his unit too.

He pointed ahead.

“Lord Jerome, there’s a city ahead.”

“Yeah...”

“That is the fortress city Marschted. The headquarters of the eastern front.”

It was a beautiful city fort surrounded by wheat fields.

As the fort was built with white boulders found in this land, the city walls and the buildings were all white.

Because it was a stronghold for a territory constantly engulfed in war, it was very large. It wasn't as big as Fort Volks, but was still on the scale of 40,000 troops and 100,000 citizens.

“The cavalry can bring out their full might on this open plain.”

“The Seventh Army is proficient in assaulting in tight formation, so this terrain will be advantageous for them.”

Even the wheat fields were just another battlefield for Jerome and the others.



Fortress City Marschtedt——

When the unit reached the city, the sun was already setting.

A war conference was held before dinner.

They attendees were seated according to their ranks.

Benjamin was seated in the innermost part of the tent, and to his right was his deputy Jestin.

Further down was the de facto commander of the Seventh Army, Coignieres.

Jerome was seated to the left. He pulled his chair as far from the table as he could. Holger stood beside him as his deputy.

Coignieres chaired the war conference.

"Let's confirm our army's situation."

In the past, he was once sent to the Beilschmidt regiment to deliver a message, and was a small man who mocks others.

But after that nightmarish defeat, he now has the responsibility as the acting commander of the Seventh Army on his shoulders. After experiencing the war with the fate of the empire on the line, he had grown quite a lot.

He felt completely different.

Coignieres' demeanour was a little similar with Regis. Probably because he respected Regis as the saviour of the nation. Be it his preparation of the information ahead of time or his other actions, all this reminded others of Regis.

"The Seventh Army left 5,000 men behind to hold the fort. 2,000 of them are in this city... The remaining 3,000 are assigned to defend other strongholds. Our combined army of 13,000 are now here to reinforce them. When the Seventh Army set off for the campaign, we have 21,000 men, even though we suffer heavy losses... I'm confident that we have enough soldiers to defend the eastern front. The Seventh Army's 8,000 infantry, Lord Benjamin's former Second Army of 4,500——"

Jerome cut in:

"You lost men again, retard."

Benjamin wiped the sweat from his brow with a handkerchief.

"W-We got ambushed on unfamiliar terrain..."

During the march, his infantry was attacked by enemies of unknown allegiance, and suffered casualties.

About a thousand men died.

Aside from those who were killed, there were many injured too. Their wounds could heal, but Benjamin still lost 20% of his combat ready forces.

Jerome sneered with disdain:

"Hmm... Regis already warned you plenty about ambushes. With that much advance notice, can this really be called an ambush?"

Unfortunately, the strategist's warning was in vain. Even though the intel was spoonfed to him, Benjamin didn't know how to prepare his troops.

Coignieres mediate between them.

"Well... We will just need to be more careful in our commands from now on."

"Tch..."

It was infuriating, but the truth was they couldn't find someone capable enough to lead these 4,500 men.

If it was just a couple hundred infantry, Jerome's subordinate would suffice.

But if the numbers exceed a thousand, oral commands couldn't be heard anymore.

It would no longer be a group, but an organization.

Regis who could adjust his command style as the number of troops increased was an exception. Normally, such a post couldn't be given to someone without the specialized training.

Even though he was incompetent, Benjamin was still a noble and had been educated in the ways of a commander.

Jerome said slowly as if he was trying to carve these words inside Benjamin's head:

"Benjamin, you only got your rank because of your peerage. Stop being narcissistic about being a Lieutenant General right now. Be aware of your incompetence and follow the orders of others."

"What!? But..."

"Right now, you're the highest ranking officer, but you're also the most incompetent here. We are all standing in the same battlefield, and you are the only one with troop losses."

"Ugghhh..."

"In terms of familiarity in fighting in this territory, Coignieres is the most experienced. As for command ability, I'm the best."

"I did lose some men, but according to military regulations..."

"Regulations that loses a war are bullshit. If you keep yapping on even though you are not fit for your rank, I will cut off your annoying hair!"

"You say I'm not fit!? Such insolence for your superior!"

Jerome swung his left hand.

He threw out a dagger, but no one could see his movements clearly. When they realized it, the dagger was stuck deep into the wall with a loud thud.

It brushed over Benjamin's head just now.

His hair fell.

"Uwahhh!?"

It was quite a bit of hair, which made Benjamin scream.

Jerome glared at him with *loup gris*-like eyes.

"Listen carefully. If your hair is gone, next will be your head. Don't you dare forget that."

"Ughhh... This is mutiny!"

"Hmmp... If that's what you want, I will make your wish come true."

"E-Even though you have the Black Knights Corp, my army is 10 times your number!"

Jerome smiled devilishly.

"I don't even need the Knights Corp. You want to issue an order to 'kill the Black Knight' over a personal grudge? Give it a try and let's see who the soldiers will point their pikes at."

Soldiers weren't chess pieces, and wouldn't obey orders unquestionably.

Furthermore, they probably hold a grudge against the commander that kept on failing.

There were no moral or literal benefits for them.

Before Benjamin could respond, Holger raised a hand.

"Pardon me... The Fourth Army detachment received the orders to "support the Seven Nation Army". In that case, doesn't it mean we should be rostered under the command of the Seventh Army?"

"Hmmm."

Benjamin made a pondering face.

He finally realized that he might die if he cross blades with the Black Knight over a heated argument.

Having an excuse for him to back down was a godsend.

"I-Indeed, what that Sir Knight said is right. The intent of the Princess is the most important. If Lord Coignieres have any plans, I will lend him my ears."

"My humble gratitude."

Coignieres bowed deeply.

Jerome sighed irritably.

— What a clown.

With only staff officers present, what's the point in being so stubborn over appearance?

As a typical grand noble, Benjamin would defend his dignity instinctively even if it doesn't make any sense.

Coignieres was nowhere near being a renowned strategist, but he was no fool.

At the very least, he knew authority wouldn't win him a battle, and understood how to watch out for sneak attacks.

If Benjamin follows his command, the situation would be much better than before.



Coignieres laid out a map on the table.

It was a map of the eastern front.

Wooden chess pieces were placed on top.

"Gentlemen, as you already know... Events that happened in the imperial capital caused tension in the eastern borders to rise. The nations at our borders used to attack whenever a chance presented itself, and we fought them several times in recent years. There was a short period of peace when the Emperor married the Princess of Estaburg though."

Johaprecia Octovia — The sixth royal consort died suddenly with many suspicious points.

And naturally, The kingdom of Estaburg was the most hostile out of all the neighbouring countries. The enemy that ambushed Benjamin's unit was probably mercenaries hired by them.

Jerome stared at the map.

"How's this city's defences?"

"The fortress city Marschtedt are garrisoned by 2,000 men from the Seventh Army.

The walls are sturdy, with numerous trebuchet and a few cannons. There are enough supplies to last 30,000 troops and 50,000 citizens for half a year. There are plenty of water from wells and reservoirs, loads of weapons and oil, as well as music instruments and books."

Then the garrison force would be the 2,000 defenders and the 13,000 reinforcement then.

"Good."

Jerome didn't like passive strategies and garrisoning forts, but he wouldn't turn it down if the time calls for it. He was commenting on the adequate preparations.

They shift their focus to the enemy nation.

Coignieres pointed and said:

"There are many smaller states to the east, but the Estaburg Kingdom clashes with the Belgarian Empire the most frequently."

Compared to the neighbouring nations, that kingdom was larger and more powerful. If not for the threat of the Empire, it would have already conquered the surrounding lands.

A dense forest laid between the Estaburg Kingdom and the Empire, which the Imperial soldiers were not proficient in fighting in.

The enemy would have the upperhand in a forest battle, while Belgaria had the advantage in plains warfare.

That was why the frontlines reached an impasse here.

Marschtedt was surrounded by wheatfields. They had the advantage of terrain in a field battle, the city didn't have any weak points, a well secured place.

A chess piece was put some distance away.

"What is this?"

After hearing Jerome's question, Coignieres replied hesitantly:

"... That's Fort Hauport. It was built to expand our territory."

In that sense, it wasn't too bad a position.

It was less than a day's march from the forest where the Estaburg Kingdom had the advantage of terrain. There was nothing to dislike about this strong chess move.

"Hmm."

"Fort Hauport is defended by 600 soldiers. The commander is from House Barguesonne——"

"Only 600? That's too few."

"Yes. But aside from Marschtedt, there are other bases in the eastern front. With the return of the Seventh Army and Fourth Army detachment, we have 18,000 men in total... After assigning the minimum number of forces to the other bases..."

Fort Hauport seemed lucky to even have 600 soldiers.

"Then pull them back. It is retarded to hold on to an offensive chess piece when it is time to defend."

"Behind Fort Hauport —— is a city of the Empire. The soldiers in the fort are supposed to protect its resident."

"Tch... Then hurry up and evacuate the citizens."

"Regrettably, even this Marschtedt city can't take in all of them. If we forcefully evacuate them, they will have to set up tents outside the walls... and that place will be relegated into a battlefield when the enemy comes."

There wasn't any point in evacuating them to another warzone.

They would either be massacred or taken hostage to be used as negotiation chips. Their belongings will be seized by the enemy and their food will be fed to their army.

All this will be beneficial to the enemy.

“What about the other forts?”

“They are all further away than here. It will be hard for the elderly, women and children. It’s another matter if Fort Hauport will absolutely fall... But it had never fell before.”

“It’s defences are that strong?”

“It’s normal since it is usually garrisoned by 5,000 soldiers.”

The burden of the losses from the war with High Britannia was pressed fully onto that fort.

No, instead of letting their entire forces fall into a disadvantage, it would be better to abandon Fort Hauport.

Coignieres' decision was appropriate.

The only problem was that aside from the fort, there was also a town.

Jerome clicked his tongue.

“Why was a town built in such a place?”

“Erm... Merchants set up shops here to serve the soldiers in the fort, and erected buildings. After that, their families move in with them. The children born there grew up and started clearing the surrounding lands to farm...”

“Isn’t that founding a new city?”

“Part of the reason is the frequent battles and stagnant frontlines here. I was actually born in that town too. As it is situated behind Fort Hauport, it’s called Hauport city.”

Jerome was a little surprised.

His opinion of Coignieres changed.

Abandoning the town made sense from the strategic level, but it was rather cold of him to concede his hometown.

"How many soldiers can Fort Hauport hold?"

"At most 10,000."

"As expected of a city fort."

In the past, Jerome was based in a small fort called Sierck. These two were probably about the same size.

A skirmish would be fine, but if the enemy outnumber the defenders more than three times, the fort would be lost.

It was useless to blame Coignieres who just became the commander some days ago...

It was necessary to build a city before expanding a fort, but building a city with just a small fort was prohibited.

Jerome himself banned shops from being set up near Fort Siercks.

That would make the lives of the soldiers less convenient, but in case anything happened, they still had the option of abandoning Fort Sierck and pulling back to the border city of Tunovell.

"You can't build a roofless house just because it is a sunny day."

When he heard what Jerome said, Coignieres nodded.

"Works to expand Marschtedt city is still ongoing. We can take in all the residents of Hauport if it goes smoothly... But it will only be done in spring next year."

That would take almost a year.

If the enemy will wait that long, there won't be any need to send the Fourth Army detachment here.

"If the citizens don't want to leave their city, then let them be. But we can't waste those

600 soldiers, put them to use elsewhere."

"... I don't know if they will obey even if I ordered them."

"What's going on? Are the 600 men here someone's private army?"

"Because the garrison in Fort Hauport hailed from Hauport City. And they are recruits and old timers that didn't join the expedition... If Estaburg Kingdom attacks, they are ready to defend their city to the death."

"You're leaving them be since they won't be much help anyways?"

Coignieres clenched his fists.

"...If I... have not taken up my current role, I will want to fight in Fort Hauport too. But for the sake of defending the Empire, I had to take up command here."



After confirming the battle situation, they need to adjust and clarify the command structure.

Since their orders were for the Black Knights and the former Second Army to be rostered under the command of Coignieres from the Seventh Army, it has more or less been settled.

After the war conference——

The map was kept and food was served.

Dishes were served one after another, this was how the aristocrats of Belgaria dined.

The main dish was venison.

Jerome looked at Holger, the new deputy commander of the Black Knights, seated beside him.

His fighting skills and horsemanship was average, but his command ability was top notch.

“... What do you think?”

“Hmm, tender and delicious. The sauce with its tangerine fragrance is high quality stuff. As expected of Belgaria’s chef.”

“Who is asking you about the venison?”

Just kidding —— Holger laughed.

Even seasoned veterans wouldn’t dare joke with Jerome. Holger was a weird man.

He said quietly:

“No matter what the Black Knights do, Marschtedt city won’t fall. But the Seventh Army are just a defeated bunch... Brigadier Coignieres will not want to let go of 500 highly skilled cavalry.”

Jerome stabbed into the venison with his knife.

The map had been kept away, but that was where Marschtedt city was positioned.

“Where do you think the enemy will strike from?”

“Their first attack will be somewhere else.”

“That’s true. What if their target is this city?”

Holger reached out with his fork.

If the map was still there, the fork’s tip would be pointing to the east.

“They might attack directly. If it is too hard, they will opt for a night raid. If it still doesn’t work, they will pillage the surrounding villages... That’s about all they can do.”

When that happens, they can maximize the full potential of the cavalry by attacking the enemy’s rear.

Jerome cut the venison with his knife.

“How do we fight them?”

“Defending the fort is too dull. After sighting the enemy, send out the cavalry, charge in and cut off their commander’s head —— That’s the method Lord Jerome prefers right?”

“Not bad, you know this very well. This is how the Black Knights roll.”

“Well, I strongly suggest holding the fort if the enemy have rifles.”

That was good enough.

“I will leave it to you then.”

“...Sounds like you’re going off. Are you taking half the Black Knights?”

“Just me alone will be enough.”

Holger was shocked.

“You want me to be the acting Knight Commander?”

“Not willing to? Well, your wage will stay the same.”

“But I can look forward to bonus if I score any war merits. Ara... Life is sure unpredictable.”

Jerome handed command of the Black Knights over to Holger.

They would just be standing by inside the solid walls of Marschtedt city for the time being anyways.

He stood up.

“Coignieres!”

“Y-Yes, what’s the matter!? Want some salt!?”

"I'm not talking about the venison! Holger Orjes over here will be covering my duties. Just talk to him if you have any orders for the cavalry."

"Ehh?"

"Even if I'm not here, we won't lose in the open plains as long as the Black Knights are here. I already told you... You will have overall command here."

"Y-Yes."

"If anyone have any complains about that, just lop off their heads —— I already gave the order to my subordinates."

Benjamin let loose a muffled scream.

If Jerome gave the word, the Black Knights wouldn't hesitate if they had to kill a noble. Their loyalty borders on being fanatical.

Holger saluted.

"I'm Third Grade Combat Officer Holger Orjes. Pleasure to meet you, Lord Coignieres."

"I-I understand... But where are you going, Lord Jerome? Are you going back to Fort Volks?"

Thump! Jerome stabbed the venison.

"There. The place where the enemy will strike first."

The map had been kept, but that was where Fort Hauport was.



The next day——

Jerome rode to Fort Hauport. He set off in the morning and reached in the evening.

What a pain...

The city was really just besides the fort.

"... So this is Hauport."

From the number of buildings here, there are about 20,000 residents in this city.

But half of the citizens had been evacuated when the number of garrison troops had been reduced. There were only about 10,000 sick and frail citizens left.

The figures of children and the elderly who would have a hard time traveling long distances were prominent.

After going past the main street where the shops were, Jerome saw a stone wall that wasn't very tall. There was a watch tower here.

It reminded him of Fort Sierck.

When he was assigned from the capital to the borders, the feelings of rage he felt when he saw that small fort was rising again within him.

Jerome gritted his teeth.

He handed a letter to the guard at the gate and declared who he was.

This caused an uproar.

The fort commander came immediately.

Jerome heard that there were only recruits and the elderly here, but the commander surprised him.

Fort Hauport's commander was a woman.

Speaking of which, the commander seemed to be related to Lieutenant General Barguesonne —— Coignieres did say that.

Jerome nursed his temple for a moment.

"Ughh..."

Small fort, female commander...

Just thinking about the duel that was a stain to his name made his head hurt.

She was about twenty, her brown hair just long enough to touch her shoulders. She performed a perfect salute.

“I’m the commander of Fort Hauport garrison regiment, subordinate to the Imperial Seventh Army —— Second Grade Combat Officer Marion Alphonse de Barguesonne.”

“You are a relative of the Lieutenant General?”

“... My grandfather was an outstanding commander.”

His granddaughter huh.

“Hmmp.”

“... Is not introducing oneself a custom of the Imperial Fourth Army?”

Her tone was respectful, but Marion’s sharp gaze was just like that conceited Princess. How infuriating.

“I’m Major General Jerome Jean de Beilschmidt. Answer me seriously—— do you people want to live?”

“Ehh? W-Well... Everyone has decided to do all they can!”

—— *Everyone decided? Is this something a commander should say!?*

Jerome mocked in his heart.

No matter what, it was as Coignieres said —— the soldiers here had no plans to give up on this ‘last bastion of defence’ that guards their hometown.

“Tch... forget it. Show me the fort.”

“What right do you have to...!! Ah, no, you are here as reinforcements from the Fourth

Army after all. I will cooperate if it is this much."

Even though Jerome outranks her, Marion wasn't his subordinate.

She had no reason to obey Jerome's orders, but she convinced herself in this way.

She was a strong willed and stick to the rules.

What a troublesome person —— Jerome thought.



After touring the gates, walls, position of the watch towers, they inspected the stables, food stock and weapon stores.

They were well equipped.

He watched the soldiers gathered in the courtyard.

They were uneasy and couldn't settle down.

After all, these were men who didn't answer to the call to go on an expedition even though the Empire was in danger. He couldn't count on them too much...

He could tell how capable they were from their faces and body.

Jerome sighed.

"A bunch of weaklings. There's nothing more to say."

Marion glared at him.

"Isn't that a rude thing to say that about my unit!?"

"There is a city behind this fort... The soldiers don't have the will to fight and there are no plans to evacuate. If the enemy comes. The citizens can only seek refuge in this fort. This means that if this fort falls, not only will the soldiers die, all the citizens will be killed too."

“I-I know that! That’s why we chose to continue garrisoning this fort!”

“And naturally, I won’t let that happen.”

“Eh!?”

“I hate failure! I won’t let Fort Hauport fall. Even if it is one small puny fort, I won’t permit the Estaburg Kingdom from taking it!”

“W-Will there be reinforcements!?”

The faces of Marion and the troops brightened immediately.

Jerome spat and said:

“Retards! The Empire doesn’t have the manpower to spare. Don’t you know how the war has been going?”

“I-I’ve seen the reports... Then, what should we do?”

“Hmmp... you bunch of trash. You lot are soldiers. Of course you will fight and win! That’s what it means to ‘defend’. No matter how noble your spirit, it’s meaningless if you lose.”

“Please stop being unreasonable! How can we win without reinforcements... Ah, no... Of course we want to win... Estaburg might be small when compared to Belgaria, they are still a military powerhouse. They have close to 30,000 men —— someone who came from elsewhere like you won’t understand!”

“Then you lots just need to git gud.”

“But those who stayed behind are just recruits and old timers!?”

Jerome showed her the written orders. It was signed by Coignieres.

Marion was dumbstruck.

“H-Hand over command authority... to you!? That’s too reckless! To a guy that just got here!? I won’t accept this! I will protest to Coignieres! If my grandfather is still alive,

he will never allow such an order——”

Jerome swung out his fist.

Pow!

The sound akin to stone splitting echoed out.

A mark was left on Marion’s face, and she collapsed onto the floor quietly.

Ara ara, Jerome shrugged.

“Anyone else who wants to defy orders? From now on, I will be the commander of this regiment. Anyone who don’t want to comply step forward. I will beat you until you comply.”

This sent the soldiers into further confusion.

The exploits of the black knight had also spread to the east. Everyone knew he was incredibly powerful.

And he hit a girl. Even though Belгарia was a patriarchal society, men who hit women were thought to be like barbarians. It was a violent act unthinkable for the aristocrats.

Will they be killed if they opposed him? The troops grew stiff.

Alright then, Jerome nodded.

“First, let’s eat!”

Now that he mentioned it, they remembered. It was almost time for dinner.



Utensils were set on the table.

The bowls were filled with watery soup.

Jerome’s bowl had some shreds of meat, but the other soldiers only had cut vegetables

in their soup.

“What the hell is this?”

“Our provisions are limited, so there’s no other way”

Marion whose eye was swollen blue said melancholically.

As expected of a female commander, she was unexpectedly strong. After regaining conscious, she sat beside Jerome.

She seemed to have relinquished her command authority as ordered, but she insisted on becoming the deputy commander even though Jerome didn’t ask her.

—— She even got knocked out, is she retarded? Or is this just her tenacious nature?
Never mind, forget it.

“The soldiers won’t become strong with these food. Bring out the meat.”

“There isn’t any.”

“Isn’t it the responsibility of the commander to prepare the stocks?”

“There’s no budget!”

“Then go hunt for food.”

“Please stop being unreasonable. If we go into the forest, the Estaburg Kingdom will ambush us. Their 《Green Berets》 are very strong. If they are around, the citizens of Hauport City won’t be able to hunt. We will be less susceptible to attack if a big group went... But having too many people will scare the wild games away!”

Hmmp! Marion stared at him. Her face seemed to be saying “You can’t do anything about that right!?”

Her attitude was maddening, but it was clear that she had given some thoughts to these issues. After rationing the food carefully, the best they could do was this salty soup.

Coignieres' unit had normal meals. This means, they didn't provide provisions to the recruits and old timers.

"If you can't go into the forest, then get them from the city."

"I already told you, there isn't any meat in the city too..."

"There's the winter supplies."

"What!? You want to use the winter supplies!? I was wrong about you! I was a bit grateful about you coming to defend this city just now! Just how barbaric are you!?"

"If this fort falls, the food in this town will become Estaburg's provisions anyway. Instead of being robbed of it after being killed, it's better to use it now."

"Are you retarded!? If we use the winter supplies, how will we make it through the winter!? We will die no matter how the war pans out!"

The enemy might come here tonight, and she was still worried about winter? Even Jerome was stunned.

But on second thought, those who were even a little bit aware of the danger had already skipped town.

Those left behind were the ones who wanted to live on just like the way they had lived in the past.

Or those who had given up...

Or stopped thinking...

Even if he issued the order, the soldiers here all hailed from Hauport. Morale would plummet if they were given direct orders to seize their hometown's winter provisions, and couldn't be ignored.

"Hmmp... It can't be helped. I will prepare the winter provisions. So get the food from the city first."

"How are you going to do that? We don't have the funds to buy food from other

territories."

An impoverished duke—— Jerome sighed in his heart.

General Barguesonne who guards the borders might be a Duke, but didn't impose the minimal taxation and lacked personal wealth.

Jerome heard that he would repair his old armour with a few knocks and continue to use it.

And the food that needs to be preserved was much more expensive than food procured locally.

If they could hunt in the woods, they just need two months to gather enough meat for the city to make it through winter.

But if they worked for two months, they wouldn't be able to raise the money to purchase the same amount of food.

Even for the Belgarian Empire where the main roads were well maintained, the transportation cost was a sizeable expenditure.

Jerome delegated the troublesome stuff away.

"No problem, leave it to me. There is a strategist called the "Wizard" in the Imperial Fourth Army. Preparing the provisions for a small city is nothing to him."

If Regis heard this, he would definitely refute it loudly.

Just how much did she trust him to think like this...

Marion leaned forth.

"We will be asking Sir Regis d'Auric!?"

——Sir?

Seemed like rumours about Regis had spread to the eastern borders.

Jerome nodded.

“Of course, use him as you wish. That fellow is like my subordinate.”

“Sir Regis isn’t coming!?”

— *Hah! That trash is probably studying in the capital to pass his test!*

Even though he thought this way, but raising Regis’ evaluation would be beneficial to Jerome in the future, so he kept up the facade.

“The strategist is in the capital right now. He’s very capable, but also very busy.”

“Ah... That’s right. He won’t come to this small fort at the borders... He’s the saviour of the nation after all.”

Her shoulders slouched.

Marion said with a sigh.

“... Even my esteemed grandfather couldn’t win against the High Britannian Army, but he won a string of victory both on land and in the sea... If it is that Sir genius strategist, he can definitely save this fort.”

The “esteemed grandfather” she mentioned was Lieutenant General Barguesonne who only issued the order to charge.

And that “Sir genius strategist” was Regis.

The difference between expectation and reality made Jerome dizzy.

“He is just a bibliomaniac.”

“He likes to read huh. I see, he must be reading deep and sophisticated strategy books. I have much to learn too.”

“He’s just reading fantasy novels for entertainment.”

“... You are lying.”

Marion looked unhappy.

Jerome shrugged.

"Regis won't be coming to the east, but it's great that he is in the capital. If you ask him to prepare the provisions for winter, he will give them to us generously."

"... Is that true?"

"If Regis dare say 'it can't be done', I will pluck his head off!"

"That won't do!? Hah... Well, if there really is a way... The Fourth Army is an elite unit after all, and is probably doing much better than the Seventh Army."

"... You said... Elite unit?"

"Yes, the commander of the Fourth Army is the Princess assisted by the young genius strategist. And the hero black knight! Well, I didn't know you are so barbaric... I heard the Imperial First Army is called the shield protecting the capital, and the Fourth Army is the unit formed to be the sword that cut down the enemy."

"Retard."

"W-What, why are you saying that so suddenly!? How rude!"

Jerome was a hero who 'won too much' and got chased out of the capital by jealous nobles.

The Fourth Princess was banished there after losing a political struggle, and Regis was an admin officer down on his luck, forced to shoulder the blame for a lost battle and reassigned.

Maybe the grass looked greener on the other side, so others thought that this unit was incredible.

When he heard Marion said all that, Jerome felt noxious and wanted to puke.

He waved his hand as if he was shooing a dog away.

“Enough, just go. Remember to bring out meat for dinner tomorrow.”

“Hmm... But I won’t expropriate them. I will borrow them from the citizens. Shall we issue receipts? It won’t just bear my name, but yours too!?”

“Whatever.”

Marion wasn’t the commander, and Jerome was the only one who could issue an expropriation order. Even so, she still wants to write her own name first.

What a conformist —— Jerome thought.

Marion finished her soup in one go. She then stood out filled with drive.

“Alright, I will stay up all night to prepare the documents!”

“You’re writing the requisition request yourself? What about the admin officers?”

“We have admin officers, but there are only about twenty of them. I have to work too... The Fourth Army must have many admin officers. I’m so envious. I heard the First Army have a thousand admin officers.”

“I fired them all, the only admin officer in the Fourth Army is Regis.”

“... Eh?”

“No, there’s one more subordinate of Auguste helping out. But the maids help out with everything else.”

They already requested for more staff from the Ministry of Military Affairs, but this matter had been postponed because the war with High Britannia had started.

“I-It’s impossible to complete the administrative works like this... Ah, you’re lying to me again!? I won’t be tricked by you! Don’t look down on me just because I’m from a backwater city!”

Marion pouted and walked away.

Jerome brought the soup to his mouth.

It would be great if they could prepare the provisions...

He needed to relay the situation here to Regis. So he needed to write a letter. It wasn't until the extent of that Princess, but Jerome hated writing.

He clicked his tongue.

And felt unmotivated.

SIDE STORY

THE BLACK KNIGHT AND THE ABANDONED FORT,

PART 2

The next morning——

The soldiers were a little excited.

Because there had turkey for breakfast.

Marion showed a “How’s that!” face.

“The troops will become stronger now right?”

“This will do.”

After breakfast, Jerome gathered the soldiers in the plaza.

And said bluntly:

“You lot are too weak!”

“Ugh...”

The soldiers reacted timidly. There were people who scolds others in normal units, but this came from the black knight himself, so no one dare refute him.

“Absolutely weak. If this unit loses, the fort will fall and the citizens will be dead.”

“Ughhh...”

They looked as if they were about to cry.

“So you have to win! In order to do so, I will train you!”

Jerome roared.

The soldiers looked at each other.

A youth standing in front raised his hand.

“W-We will become stronger?”

“Of course! Strength and sword skills can’t be trained in a day or two. But your mentality can become stronger! It will just take an instant!”

“Woahh!”

The soldiers’ expression became cheerful.

The eyes of Marion who was listening besides him also started sparkling.

Jerome spat:

“Why are you lot showing such a naive expression!? When I say you can change in an instant, I mean—— you will change the instant you see hell!”

“H-Hell!?”

The atmosphere of hope that was hyped up disappeared in an instant.

Jerome raised the corners of his lips.

“I will let you witness hell! So change properly for the sake of defeating the enemy — — No, when the time comes, you probably won’t think much of the enemy.”

Marion panicked.

“W-Wait! What are you going to do!? There’s only recruits and old timers here! If you go too far, they will be worn out before the battle...”

“Who cares about that! We will start the ‘you will rather be dead’ training today! No, people will actually die. Those without drive, those not capable enough and those who are unlucky!”

“That won’t do!”

“Anyone who can’t do it can sound out. I can excuse him from training.”

Marion patted her chest in relief.

The soldiers also showed an expression that says “Since you say so”.

“You lots... really want to live your entire lives in a decadent way huh. You believe you won’t be treated harshly just because you’re weak soldiers. Even now, when the enemy might come this day and murder your entire family, you still can’t find the resolve to die for the cause. Retards! That’s why you lot are the worst unit. It has nothing to do with being recruits or old timer. It’s because of your wimpy nature! That’s why you all will die, every single one of you!”

“What...!?”

The faces of Marion and the soldiers turned green.

He didn’t care how scared they were, and spoke mercilessly.

“I’m not a drill instructor. This is not a boot camp. You are in a fort, at the front line, a warzone! I will treat weaklings like weaklings. Those who can’t keep up with today’s training just sound out. I will assign them to hunt wild games in the forest.”

The soldier who raised his hand stepped forward.

“This is tyranny! It’s as good as telling us to die! There are 《Green Berets》 in the forest! How can you give such a cruel order!?”

“Hmmp, then complain to the Ministry... I don’t mind. When those damn bureaucrats in the capital slowly make their way here in the autumn to investigate, you think this fort will still be here?”

“Ughh...”

“Don’t you lots have the will to die for the sake of protecting this fort?”

“O-Of course we have... But, everyone needs to fight together...”

“Bunch of retards! Battles have to be fought on your own! Allies will just hold you back!”

“Eehhh!?!”

The youth stumbled a step back.

Marion hugged her head.

“T-That’s because... you are strong. The weak needs to work together with others...”

“The precondition for co-op battle is for each individual to have a certain skill standard! Cooperation between the weak just makes me laugh! Even if you pile up trash to form a hill, that is still garbage!”

The youth refuted again.

“T-There’s power in numbers! That’s what the others taught me. If everyone work together, there can be miracles... We have 600 people here... Even if you are the black knight, we can beat you too!”

He rest his hand on his hilt.

Jerome didn’t move, or reach for his sword.

“And?”

“Take back your words! Don’t conduct training that might lead to deaths! Don’t issue the cruel orders of heading into the forest!”

Fufufu... Jerome laughed quietly.

“You can beat me with 600 men? Then try me. Let me show you that gathering trash together will still be trash. Draw your sword!”

“U-Ughhh...”

Jerome sauntered forward slowly, closing in on that young soldier.



“The training starts now. The rules are simple. Survive.”

“Ehh?”

“Survive in a fight against me. Don’t worry, I will hold back since this is training.”

“What are you saying...!?”

The young soldier flew into the air.

He was sent flying because Jerome punched him in the stomach.

At the same time, he snatched the sword fastened to the soldier’s waist. It was a mass produced product of the military, but it was well taken care of.

“Hmmp... Only your weapon is good. Oh right, let me say this first, this is training. Anyone who runs from this plaza will be treated as desertion before the enemy —— I will really kill them. If you don’t want to die, then don’t run.”

“K-Kill him ahhh—— !!”

Another soldier charged him.

Jerome leaned back to dodge.

He then hit that person with the flat of his sword, flooring him.

Next, he swing his sword at someone just standing with a blank face. Blood gush out from that man’s forehead.

“Ahhh—— !?”

“How careless! Dozing off in my face!? You have a death wish!?”

A few men behind cried out and fled.

“Uwahhhh——!!, T-This is weird! Weird! Nooooo!”

“No! Don’t run! You will really be killed!”

Marion yelled.

Those who had not completely lost it reacted to her orders. They pulled and grounded those who were trying to escape.

“D-Don’t run! Lady Marion is right! If the black knight really wanted to kill, there would be plenty of corpses already!”

“B-B-But but!”

“Look! H-He’s alive! Probably!”

The youth who were sent flying at the start staggered to his feet.

“Ugghhhh... Blaarrgghh!!”

He threw up.

Jerome shrugged.

“Ara, even though we had turkey for breakfast.”

“D-Demon.”

“Kukuku... don’t be retarded —— I’m a good guy who won’t talk back when the priest lectures me during mass.”

The soldiers finally understood the situation.

The man before them was a hero, had extraordinary prowess, a terrible personality and didn’t care about the sanctity of life.

Marion shouted:

“Everyone, remember how it is done in our training! Surround him and finish him off!”

“Good, that’s more like it. The whole lot of you, come at me. I suggest you hurry up. If I get tired —— I won’t be able to hold back my strength.”

The screams of 600 men echoed through Fort Hauport.



Night——

Jerome lied in his bed that was beside the window. The candle was already out.

There was a knocking on the door.

He didn't answer.

After a moment, the door opened quietly.

Someone came in.

The moonlight shining through the window illuminated a petite figure.

“.....”

“Night raid? That's nice, but don't need to knock for that.”

That figure was surprised by Jerome's voice—— then exhaled.

It was Marion.

“Answer properly if you are still awake.”

“I was asleep.”

“... Liar. Can the knocking sound wake you?”

“This is a battlefield.”

“Then... No, forget it. By the way, about the training today...”

“Was I too lenient?”

"It's the opposite! I think you went too far. That was like a war. The infirmary is full, and our hands are full with the injured... S-Some of them even cried!?"

"I'm one of them. You lot are so useless it made me cried."

"Please don't joke with me!"

"Hah... You are the one who is joking with me. What's the use of such weak soldiers in a war? If the enemy attacks, when the first few soldiers are killed, half of the troops will flee. Even though I'm their only opponent, they ended up in such a state."

"T-that's because... You're too fast..."

"In war, that's how sudden a situation would change in your immediate region. When your allies in front of you falls, you will become the front rank."

"... Most of the soldiers are conscripted farmers. They used to work in farms or construction."

"I can tell from how they mustered. The standard of the Seventh Army expedition unit is still acceptable. But those who stayed behind in this fort are trash."

"I don't deny that. That's why no one complain even when a woman like me became the commander. The soldiers here aren't elite like the Fourth Army."

"What then? Raise the white flag and surrender when Estaburg invades?"

"Erm..."

"We will all die one day. Since they are soldiers, they should at least die in a battle with the enemy. Being shot dead while running away will be absolutely disgraceful."

"I-I know... But that's too harsh..."

"You should know very well that normal training will never make those lot become standard soldiers."

"Such a thing!"

Marion went closer to the bed.

Unexpectedly, she wasn't wearing a uniform, but a dress that bares her shoulder. Just like an aristocratic lady.

Jerome looked at her figure illuminated by the moonlight.

"Has the bruising faded...?"

"That's impossible. I put on make-up."

"Going into a man's room in the middle of the night with make-up. This wouldn't end with nothing. Well, no one would be unmoved by this."

"Y-Yes... That's right... The black knight should be used to such things..."

Marion said with her voice trembling.

Jerome said with a voice that seemed to be melting into the night.

"Well then, first is night time etiquettes... Before you get on the bed, take off your dress."

"..."

She put her hands on her shoulders and froze.

Taking off her clothes —— She seemed to be struggling with her sense of shame.

Jerome smiled wryly.

"If you want to use the dagger you hid behind you effectively, then hide your killing intent."

"You knew...!?"

Marion whose face turned completely red stabbed with her dagger.

Acting decisively, not bad.

Jerome grabbed her wrist that was holding the dagger.

Her wrist was so slender that it would probably break if he exert a bit more force. As expected of a woman's wrist power.

Unlike that Princess.

"Well, it's that princess who is strange. This is normal."

"I-I will kill you!"

"Don't you want to defend the fort? How are you going to do that if you kill me?"

"Everyone will be dead before that if they undergo such harsh training! I will protect everyone!"

Jerome grabbed the front of collar and pulled her in.

"Retard! Those lots are so useless because you're overly protective of them!"

"Overly protective!?"

"Just watch me carefully! As long as I don't think you all are hopeless, I won't give up on all of you just yet!"

"Think I'm... hopeless... give up...!?"

"What people really think isn't expressed through words, but actions—— I'm training them, and you want to stop me. Who do you think the troops will choose for the sake of becoming stronger? Who will they choose to win the war? Harsh training? They survived. So they will be stronger tomorrow!"

"I, I... Everyone..."

Marion trembled and couldn't say a word.



The bugle for reverie was blown before dawn.

Training just like yesterday began.

“Hyaaaa—!!”

“Gyaaa——!!”

Jerome swung his fist and a soldier flew.

At this moment, several swords slashed at him.

Many people was sent flying the day before, so they got used to it. They were not fazed when a couple of them were knock into the air.

“Die, black knight!”

“Hmmp... Naive.”

Jerome drew his sword, parried all the incoming swords and kicked the stomach of his opponent.

“Blarrghhh—!!”

The training continued until breakfast, and then went on until the bell signalling the night fall.

One month passed.



Fortress City Marschtedt——

Morning, Coignieres practiced his sword in the courtyard.

Even though he spent most of his day on war conference and administrative paper work.

But on the battlefield, the thing he could count on was his own body. So he couldn't relax on his training.

"Hah! Hee!"

"Morning, you are full of drive."

The man who came to the courtyard was the acting commander of the black knights—
— Holger.

After wiping his sweat with a towel handed to him by a maid, Coignieres said with a smile.

"You flatter me... This must be child's play for Sir Holger"

The black knights had the reputation of being the strongest knights in the Empire after all.

The First Army was said to be the strongest in the past, but there was a rumour of a skirmish during the Founding Day Festival in which the black knights won convincingly.

Holger shook his head.

"No no... you are really strong. Sorry for interrupting your practice, I received a letter here."

"Letter?"

"From our Sir Strategist."

"Oh, Sir Regis!?"

There were two letters.

"One is for Lord Jerome. I took a look, it concerns aiding Hauport City on their food supply and some other matters."

“Eh, you opened a personal letter!?”

“Well, if there is any orders for the Black Knights, I have to carry them out after all.”

“Oh, I see.”

“I didn’t open the letter addressed to Sir Coignieres, so don’t worry.”

The wax seal on the letter was intact.

“Ah, no... I’m not doubting you.”

“Haha... I know you don’t mean anything by that. But I’m from a foreign nation, so it’s normal for you to be suspicious. There’s nothing wrong with that.”

“You think there’s nothing wrong with this?”

“Trusting others might be a virtue, but others will prefer a commander to be wary of everything.”

“Indeed, a commander that’s easily tricked don’t feel reliable.”

“That’s right... By the way, did you write a letter to Sir Strategist earlier?”

“I merely tagged along with Lord Jerome’s personal mail. I’m ashamed to say that I wrote about the current situation in the eastern front, and hope to get his advice.”

Coignieres broke open the wax.

He opened the letter.

Regis’ signature was on the letter.

Holger had an intrigued expression.

“Ohh, what did the Sir Strategist say? Ah, no... it’s fine if it’s not convenient to tell me.”

“Fufu... I already told you that I trust Sir Holger.”

Coignieres opened the letter for Holger could read it too.

Holger was surprised, and his gaze then fell on the words.

“Hmmm... This is...”

“Yes, this is just like a divination letter.”

“What should we do?”

“I was thinking about focusing on defending earlier but...”

“The Black Knights can deploy at any moment.”

“The Seventh Army too.”

Coignieres and Holger locked eyes, then nodded.



Fort Hauport——

Lunch time.

“Meat! Give me more!”

The soldiers had a murderous air about them.

Blood kept dripping from the young soldier’s outreached arm. Marion ran to him with bandages when she saw that.

“Aren’t you hurt!?”

“Ah, Lady Marion... Hurt? Ohh, this is just a scratch from the black knight’s sword. It didn’t hit break the bone, I will be fine.”

“Y-You got slashed by a sword...”

“There are guys with fractures too. If I get bothered by this, I would lose my head.”

“But pus will form if you ignore your wounds?”

“If it rots, I can just cauterize it. Everyone does that, it’s much simpler.”

“... Cauterize!?”

“But I will feel hungry if I bleeds—— Ah, speaking of which, Lady Marion.”

“W-What...?”

“Thank you very much! I heard these meat are prepared by Lady Marion. Everyone’s very grateful!”

“Erm... It’s thanks to the citizens who are willing to share it with us, and Sir Regis who promised to prepare their winter provisions...”

“Sir Regis is awesome! But Lady Marion is the one who brought us the meat. Please watch me, I will do it! I will definitely hit the black knight tomorrow!”

The soldiers around her also said “That’s right!” “Kill him!”

Marion sighed again.

“... Be careful.”

“Yes!”

A messenger ran over and knelt before Marion.

I’m the deputy commander now—— Even though that was what Marion was thinking, it must be important since the messenger was in such a rush.

“What’s the matter!?”

“A large group of men was sighted in the forest! It might be an enemy attack!”

“E-Enemy attack!?”

“What should we do!?”

“Are you sure about that? We need to grasp their numbers first...”

A face suddenly appeared—— it was Jerome.

He grabbed the messenger by the collar.

“You must report to me, the commander first.”

“M-My apologies.”

He apologized with a bitter face.

Jerome roared:

“Sound the alarm right now!”

Marion said frantically:

“Ehh!? But we need to confirm if it really is the enemy...”

“Retard, speed is of the essence in war! If the report is wrong, then just snap the neck of the guard on watch!”

He flung the messenger out.

“Uwahh!?”

“Sprint! Sprint with all your might! Sound the alarm and report on the enemy’s movements!”

“Yes Sir!”

The messenger stumbled and ran off.

Marion’s face turned gloomy.

“If it was a mistake, then everyone would be worried over nothing...”

“This can be a training drill. More importantly... They are here. It’s real.”

“Eh?”

Jerome twisted his lips.

“Kukuku... This atmosphere isn’t bad. There’s a powerful guy. And he’s letting out his killing intent purposely in order to intimidate.”

“L-Liar! Who... Who would know about killing intent or something!”

“Is that the extent of your common sense? Your power level is too low.”

“What!?”

“Just stay in a place the arrows won’t reach and watch.”

“I can fight too!”

Jerome pat Marion’s shoulder.

“You are shaking, don’t push yourself.”

“Ah...”

“Cowards will just get in the way.”

After leaving a hurtful comment, Jerome walked to his horse.

A moment later, the alarm rang.

“Enemy attack——!! Enemy attack—— It’s the Estaburgers!!”



As they had planned ahead of time, the gate on the city side was opened to let the citizens in.

They were allowed to squeeze into the courtyard. There was no roof, no place to lie down, and only the muddy ground. It wasn't a place one could stay for several days.

But staying here was better than staying in the city and being slaughtered by the enemy. The citizens weren't unhappy about this, and even offered words of encouragement to the troops.

A messenger ran over.

"Lady Marion, we have rounded up all the citizens! Closing the west gate now!"

"Good, hurry. And inform Sir Coignieres about the attack."

"We will send a smoke signal!"

"Right, make it quick."

Marion looked to the sky. The sun was a bit to the west now, but it would be six hours before it gets dark.

Will the fort hold til then...

Will reinforcement come...?

The smoke signal reporting the enemy attack was sent.

Marion looked towards the eastern wall.

The black knight was there.

Jerome scaled the eastern wall and stare down his enemy.

Enemy soldiers kept pouring in, numbering about 20,000.

They have not attack yet.

It might look close, but this place was still 50Ar (3573m) from the forest. Not a distance that could be closed in one go.

It would be 15 minutes before they reached the point where the fort's arrows could reach them.

"Kukuku... that's quite a number."

Jerome said something terrifying with a laugh.

The soldiers looked scared.

"C-Commander, aren't you afraid?"

"Afraid of what?"

"We only have 600 people while the enemy have 20,000... Erm... How many times do they outnumber us?"

Another soldier said:

"It's 30 times. And those in green armour are the 《Green Berets》. The archers of Estaburg are really strong."

Jerome glared at the troops.

"Fu? You think 30 mob soldiers from Estaburg are stronger than me? Seems like I have been going too easy for my training."

"Ugh!? No... not at all..."

"Then laugh! Don't lose to those bastards!"

"Y-Yes!"

The atmosphere changed.

The soldiers intimidated by the 20,000 enemy started laughing. Soon, others joined them.

Forcefully laughing to suppress one's fear was better than trembling.

Jerome thought:

— *They actually committed their main forces all at once huh.*

Their intention was to win an overwhelming debut battle, then ride the momentum to continue their attack.

The Estaburg soldiers wore green armour and held bows. Even though they were attacking a fort, they were using mid poundage bows. Those were probably their preferred weapon.

The enemy commander was no fool. He knew no weapons were better than the ones they were used to.

When sprinting in the forest, a long bow gets in the way. It was more effective to use a shorter bow in the woods.

It was very difficult to watch out for arrows shot by enemies hiding in the shadows of the woods.

On top of that, the grass and roots made the terrain worse, making it hard to close in with the enemy. A clumsy pursuit might run into an ambush. Archers in the woods were a formidable foe.

However, those Estaburg soldiers had come out onto the plains.

This was a good chance.

It was impossible for the 600 men to proactively attack the 20,000 enemy, but they could definitely hit the enemy's vanguard hard.

A messenger ran to him.

"Commander! A letter from the capital!"

“What?”

“It’s from the strategist Sir Regis d’Auric!”

—— At a time like this!?

Jerome glared at him fiercely, which made the innocent messenger yelp.

“Tchh... Later! A battle is ongoing right now!”

“Eh!? But Sir Strategist...”

“What use is a letter from a capital when the battle here had already started!? Just toss it over there!”

“Y-Yes Sire...”

The messenger backed away with a nod.

Jerome gritted his teeth.

Maybe Regis predicted this situation and wrote down a counter measure.

But Jerome was a man known as a hero.

He wasn’t that desolate that he had to rely on someone so far away from the battlefield.

——*Even without Regis’ schemes, I can win!*

The sentry yelled:

“Commander! They have passed the marker!”

“Fire the ballistas!”

The catapults fixed to the city walls toss out stones the size of a human head.

They had marked the range before hand, so it would definitely hit.

Even though the Estaburg archers were skilled, their shots couldn't reach the fort with the mid poundage bows they used in the woods.

For the time being, the attacks were one sided.

— *There isn't enough ballistas in this fort.*

They inflicted less than a thousand enemy casualty.

Soon, the arrows from the Estaburg army came flying.

They already knew about the proficiency of the enemy's archer, so the defenders were prepared.

A large shield that needed several people to erect was lifted up.

Arrows fell like a torrential rain.

“Wahh!”

A soldier who screamed got hit by the others.

“Damn it, now's not the time to be scared!”

“O-Oh!”

Even with adequate preparation, they couldn't avoid injuries, and there were several wounded.

Even so, they still withstood the enemy's first wave.

The Estaburg side placed their ladders onto the stone wall.

This was a classic fort attack.

Arrows were used to suppress the defender's movement, and soldiers used the opportunity to scale the walls.

Jerome shouted:

“Burn them!”

The fort defenders opened the lid on barrels and poured the content onto the ladders. This was oil. Some men got shot, but they successfully poured down the oil.

The old soldier wounded by arrow still threw the torch in his hand even though he was still bleeding.

“Long live the Empire!”

“Uwahhh——!!”

Screams came from the Estaburg side.

The blinding light was just like the sun.

The light of the ladder and human being burnt.

They continued delivering heavy blows to the enemy.

But the difference in numbers was too large. Fort Haupert was completely surrounded.

Merely 600 imperial soldiers fended off arrows and soldiers coming from all sides, and they slowly fell through attrition.



Evening——

Concentrated attacks from three directions were directed towards one corner of the wall.

The best men had been assigned there from the start, but this was a weak point right from the beginning.

After the guards around there died, they couldn't keep the ladders away any longer

and the Estaburg soldiers finally scaled the wall.

“Gyaahh!!”

The Imperial soldiers draw their bows and unleashed arrows of fury.

“Warrghh!”

It was a short period of time, but the soldiers who had been through the hellish training wasn't afraid of battle.

But the enemy came up the ladders one after another.

The number of enemies appearing outnumber their dead.

Despite that, not a single imperial soldier turn to flee.

“We can't lose! If we lose the fort will fall!”

“Don't joke with me! We are the Belgaria army! We won't lose to Estaburg trash!”

The young soldier stabbed with his pike.

He wasn't skilled enough to avoid arrows.

He was shot in the stomach.

“It doesn't hurt! Compared to the black knight's beating, this is nothing!”

「Gyahhh!!」

The pike of the young soldier pierced the Estaburg soldier.

“Alright! Next!”

「Die Gaian pig!」

“I'm not afraid of small fries like you! Compared to the scary black knight, this is nothing!”

Their excitement dulled their pain, and they exerted arm power that might hurt their muscles. The pikes pierce the enemy's heart with a speed of a skilled wielder.

“Again!”

A sword suddenly swung out from the midst of the Estaburg archers.

The right arm of the young imperial soldier was lopped off.

「Damn fools.」

“Ughhh!?”

This man was wearing white armour unlike the others. He had a sword in hand, a larger stature than the soldiers around him, and moved much faster.

「Revenge for my sister!」

“Huh!?”

The sword slashing at the young soldier——

Was deflected by a black lance.

A man in black armour stepped forth.

“Hmmp... I thought you guys can only spam arrows, aren't you an interesting one.”

The young soldier who was on the verge of keeling over mumbled:

“... Black... Black knight.”

His vision was gradually engulfed by darkness.

Jerome said without turning back.

“You held on until my arrival. You have splendidly accomplished your duties as an imperial soldier.”

Tears fell from the young soldier's eyes.

"P-Please... black knight... win..."

"Of course!"

Jerome thrust out his lance.

The Estaburg soldier in white armour dodged with feral-like movement.

「Revenge—— for my sister Johaprecia! I will kill the imperial commander——」

"Don't nag during a fight, it's annoying!"

Three incredibly fast thrust pierced the white armour.

「What!？」

"Woahhhh!"

Jerome roared furiously.

He knocked the white armoured soldier that was gushing blood off the wall. He then thrust with a speed that the surrounding archers didn't have the time to react to.

He kept killing the enemy soldiers scaling the wall, until the reserves finally arrived.

Although they were all old timers, they weren't fazed by the corpses on the ground and calmly doused the ladders and lit them up.

When the Estaburg side saw that their allies on the wall had been wiped up, they started shooting arrows again.

By this time, the defenders had erected wooden shields.

Jerome lowered his gaze.

The young soldier by the stone wall had collapsed. He won't ever move again.

The sun setted.

When night falls, they wouldn't be able to see where their arrows were landing and wouldn't know if their allies had scaled the walls. That would just result in more unnecessary sacrifices for the attackers.

The bugle was sounded, and the Estaburg army withdrew from Fort Hauport.

The tattered imperial soldiers trembled at this sight.

"The enemy... is pulling back...!?"

"20,000 enemy soldiers... retreated... retreated..."

"Won... We won..."

"Uwaaahhhh! We won—!!"

The soldiers shouted.

The 600 men of Fort Hauport fended off the Estaburg army of 20,000.

Even though the defenders had the advantage of being fort defenders, this was a miraculous victory.

Even though this was just the first day...



Fort Hauport was like a morgue.

Even the some of the citizens seeking refuge in the courtyard died from stray arrows.

There were more dead soldiers than living soldiers.

Cautious of an enemy night raid, Jerome sat on the stairs to the city wall with his eyes closed.

“.....”

Sound of footfalls made him open his eyes.

It was Marion.

“Ah...”

“You didn’t bring a dagger tonight.”

“But I have a sword. I have no intention of cutting you down though.”

“Hmmp... How’s that... we won.”

“I think that is marvelous. But what about tomorrow?”

Jerome turned silent.

Marion offered him a cup.

He took and drank it.

The water nourished his dehydrated body.

“Tchh... At a time like this, you should bring beer.”

“It’s not good for your wounds.”

“A battle on this level is not enough to wound me.”

“You let the doctor treat you just now.”

Jerome clicked his tongue.

“That quack doctor.”

“You are a key personnel for the defences of this fort, I ordered him in advance to report any issues to me.”

“Relax, tis but a flesh wound.”

“Is that so... but the troops are at their limits. You already know that. Only 300 or so survived, and less than 200 are fighting fit. We have no more reserves... If there is another breach, we won’t be able to stop the gap.”

“Then what? Surrender?”

“T-That...”

“I killed a man in white armour... That’s probably the son of King Estaburg. Consort Johaprecia’s elder brother. Although he didn’t even say his name...”

Marion gasped.

The enemy would become more driven.

Even if they surrender, they would get massacred.

She said vexingly:

“Going from Marschtedt city to Fort Hauport, reinforcement will reach by evening if they are fast... or nightfall if they are slow.”

“Yes.”

“So why isn’t reinforcement coming!?”

“Don’t ask such an obvious question. We had been abandoned. There’s no other answer.”

“Why!?”

“In the first place, this is a fort that should be abandoned. And the enemy numbered 20,000 while the Seventh Army can only mobilize 13,000 men. Even if reinforcements come, they would be overwhelmed by the enemy instead.”

Even if they could fend off the enemy, they would pay a heavy price and make it harder to maintain the frontline.

Abandoning this place was an obvious decision.

"Ugghhh... I know... I know. But are they really going to turn a blind eye to us...?"

Marion's tears fell.

Jerome didn't expect any reinforcement.

However, he did consider the possibility that the black knights would come. He felt that he was abandoned.

"This is depressing."

"... Why did you come here? You aren't born in Hauport in the first place."

Jerome crossed his arms.

And tilted his head.

— Was he trying to achieve a victory that was as improbable as magic in order to prove that he was as good as that strategist?

Wasn't that childish?

"Hmmp... I already told you. I hate failing. Even if it is this small fort, I won't allow Estaburg to take it."

He upheld his pride.

Even if it cost him his life.

Fearing, running and dying without putting up a fight was a shitty life.

Marion rubbed the corners of her eyes.

"What... should we do...?"

"There is only one thing soldiers doomed for hell should do."

“Eh?”

“That is to bring one more enemy with them. Kill kill kill, send them a message that a war with Belgaria is not worth it. That is the mission of doomed soldiers. Their final mission.”

She said tremblingly:

“What about the citizens...?”

“Give them knives to off themselves. Being taken prisoner would be a worse fate.”

“Ugghhh...”

Marion cried again.

A quiet night that didn’t feel like a battlefield passed.

Only the constant sound of sobbing.



Imperial Year 851 August 3rd——

The sky was clear this morning.

The Estaburg army approached Fort Hauport once again with the rising sun.

Most of the ballistas had been destroyed by fire arrows, they couldn’t pull off the same attack they used yesterday.

The troops waited on the fort walls.

Everyone who could move was already on there.

They had depleted their reserves.

Marion stood besides Jerome. Her eyes were red.

“T-The enemy is approaching.”

“Hmmp... I can see that. They are determined to take this fort and kill everyone inside. They can't withdraw or ignore us and continue advancing. It's not like they have magic.”

At this moment, the sentry said something strange.

“Black smoke sighted to the east!”

Jerome tilted his head.

He could see the black smoke.

—— A forest fire?

A wild fire? But it wasn't spreading.

Marion squinted.

“That direction... Could it be... the Estaburg base?”

“What!? Hey, the map! Bring it to me!”

A soldier ran over.

The Estaburg side seemed to have noticed too.

The advance halted and the turned rowdy.

A thunderous boom came from afar.

Jerome's expression turned sinister.

“That's actually... a cannon?”

Sounds that came from a far distance were usually cannons.

Marion said:

“Did someone else attacked the enemy’s base!?”

Not just anyone.

The only group that could prepare cannons and mount an attack on the Estaburg’s base could only be the Seventh Army.

The troops noticed too.

“It’s the Seventh Army! General Coignieres!”

A map was brought to Jerome.

He stared at the map.

—— From Fort Hauport to Estaburg’s base.

The distance was 5 Li (22km).

The sound of cannons might be audible.

Jerome couldn’t tell if it really was audible.

And of course it was the same for the Estaburg army.

But the sound of cannons was coming from the direction of their base and there were signs of fire.

Even a retard would understand.

While their main forces was attacking a small fort, their own base had been attacked by the Empire.

When they saw their allies debuting from an unexpected place, the expression of the soldiers in the fort brightened up.

Only Jerome was looking at the battle.

“Damn it... This scheme is used to divert the enemy’s next actions!”

The sentry yelled:

“Turning! The Estaburg army is turning! They are turning east and leaving!”

Warrrghhh!! The soldiers cheered like they did yesterday.

Jerome roared:

“Don’t relax! Things are just starting!”

“Ehh?”

Marion who was as happy as the troops opened her eyes wide.

“What’s the matter? Isn’t the Estaburg army returning to their base?”

“Look carefully. His plan isn’t something so “gentle”.”

In this battlefield, only Jerome noticed.

The Estaburg army entered the forest.

At this moment, rifle reports sounded out.

Countless of them.

It came from the forest.

Even the soldiers looking from Fort Hauport yelped in surprise.

The Estaburg army fell into disarray after being attacked.

Marion yelled:

“W-What’s going on!?”

"It's an ambush. The soldiers laying the ambush in the forest is definitely not from Estaburg."

"T-Then, who...?"

"Are you all retards? It's the Seventh Army of course."

"Eh!? Then the attack on the Estaburg base is...?"

Jerome understood what kind of scheme this was.

He spat and said:

"That's a ruse. After seeing the fire and hearing the cannons, even you lot thought that "Estaburg's base had been attacked". Their target is the enemy main forces that are retreating in a panic. When the enemy got hit by the ambush of riflemen and fall into confusion—"

Black armoured knights appeared in the forest.

The soldiers in Fort Hauport pointed and said:

"It's the black knights! And the banner of general Coignieres!"

Even if the Seventh Army commit their entire force, they would just be caught in an unfavourable battle of 13,000 against 20,000.

They would pay a heavy price even if they won.

But now, they were attacking one sidedly.

Because the Estaburg army was hit by the ambush in the woods they were so proud of, the entire army fell into disarray.

Jerome roared:

"This is a good chance right now! Anyone who can still move pick up your pikes!"

Marion said frantically:

“Eehhh! W-What do you want to do!?”

“Those bastards are our prey! There’s no reason to gift them to the Seventh Army!
Attack! Open the gates!”

“Please stop! Everyone’s tired...”

The soldier’s roar drowned out her voice.

“Warrghhh! Let’s get it on!”“Revenge!”“I will cut off the enemy commander’s head!”

If they weren’t that excited, they couldn’t bring their exhausted body to the battlefield.

And it wasn’t Jerome’s character to let confused enemy soldiers who were fleeing go.

“Kill those bastards!”

Two hundred men charged out of the gates.

There was a huge difference in numbers after all, so the enemy soldiers fleeing their way outnumbered them...

However, this was a pincer attack by an organized unit against a panicking mob, so the match was already decided.

The commander of the Estaburg army raised the white flag before noon.

The eastern front achieved an overwhelming victory.



In front of Fort Hauport.

The black knights gathered after finding Jerome.

The knight leading them—— Holger dismounted.

“Sorry for the wait.”

"Hmmp... I don't remember calling for you."

"Then we have poked our nose into your business. Sorry about that."

"Is this that guy's scheme?"

"Yes it is... You haven't read that letter yet huh. Or he didn't write the details clearly on his letter to you?"

"Tch... So it happened again."

It's Regis' scheme again. Were the actions of both friend and foe within his grasp!?

Jerome glared at the ground.

Holger smiled wryly and said:

"Sir Regis' plan was based on the assumption that Fort Hauport could hold for one day. We set off from Marschtedt and went the long way around the battlefield to set our traps. If there wasn't enough time, the plan wouldn't have worked."

"Tch... Did he predicted the valiant struggles of the troops too!?"

"Well, that too... But I think his trust in Lord Jerome plays a big part."

Regis seemed to have grasped the situation from Coignieres and Jerome's letters, and proposed this strategy.

He had different proposals based on the different ways the enemy might attacks, and one of his plan worked.

Holger handed Regis' letter over.

"The letter starts with 'this situation is just like a book I read'."

"It's this attitude of his that makes me so mad!"

Jerome snatched the letter, crumpled it up and threw it onto the ground.

Holger shrugged.

"By the way, I think the responsibility of acting knight commander is too heavy for me. It's too suffocating for me, can you come back?"

The other riders of the Black Knights also dismounted and kneeled on one knee.

"General, please come back!"

Jerome looked at them.

And said sternly:

"... You lot, what's that battle just now? I was just gone for a month... and that's how slow you all got? I will train you all properly again, prepare yourselves!"

"Y-Yes!"

Their shout was a mixture of fear and joy.

Jerome suddenly turned back.

Before him was the short and small Fort Hauport.

The walls were burned and the gate was on the verge of collapse.

Soldiers and citizens formed long lines in front of the fort. Many had tears flowing from their eyes.

Marion issued the order.

"Everyone, to our hero, General Jerome... Salute!"

霸劍の皇后

アルティーナXII

読んでくださってありがとうございます！

イラストはクール担当イエシカさんです。

むらさきさん、担当の和田さん、

今回も大変楽しませていただきました。
ありがとうございます。





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